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Barbarella - Queen Of The Galaxy

Jane Fonda plays the space adventuress, stranded on a frightening planet. Battling alien creatures every step of the way, she also finds time for uninhibited sensual pleasures. Made in 1968, this was one of Fonda's first films. (Color)

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with the inevitable brutality of war in one of the most fully realized fantasy worlds ever created...*Windaria*. (Color)

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Wizards

The master of animation Ralph Bakshi provides a different twist on the age-old battle between good and evil. Blackwolf plans to invade the realm of his eccentric but kindhearted brother Avatar. Whipped into a frenzy by Nazi propaganda films and armed with long-forgotten instruments of war, Blackwolf's goblin army begins to terrorize his brother's rainbow paradise. (Color)

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Dragonslayer

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House Of Dark Shadows

Based on the popular TV show comes this movie about Barnabas and the strange happenings at Collinwood. As a series of attacks leaves all of the victims with distinctive marks on the neck, Barnabas Collins arrives in town searching for a new wife. Jonathan Frid, Grayson Hall, Kathryn Leigh Scott, Roger Davis, John Karlen and the one and only Joan Bennett star. (Color)

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Dear Shawna,

I'm dropping a line to say thanks for including me in your premiere issue. If I may, though, I would like to offer a few corrections to the piece:

First, the title of my short film (and the Stephen King story upon which it's based) is *The Woman in the Room*, not *The Lady in the Room*, as was reported.

Second, the film was not done as a student project at NYU or anywhere else—the truth is, I never attended college or university. This rumor about my attending NYU dates back to a 1985 *Cinefantastique* article which confused me with Jeff Schiro, whose film *The Boogeyman*, directed while he was at NYU, appeared alongside mine on the Stephen King's *Nightshift* videotape. Though CFQ was kind enough to run a correction in a later issue, the misconception lives on. (Misconceptions have a way of doing that—I daresay when I am laid to rest, my tombstone will likely read: "Here lies Frank Darabont, Graduate of NYU.")

Third, the Stephen King collection from which *The Shawshank Redemption* is adapted is *Different Seasons*, not *Four Past Midnight* as mentioned in the article.

Thank you for letting me set the record straight, and sincere congratulations for mounting such a handsome magazine. *Realms of Fantasy* strikes me as a labor of love, so I wish you the greatest success.

Frank Darabont

Frank, please accept my sincere apologies for the long-standing mixup which we have now more firmly affixed in the public's memory. I'm delighted that you enjoyed the magazine, and I wish you enormous success with The Shawshank Redemption.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

First of all, the visual quality—exquisite is not an adequate adjective. Your printing house was evidently chosen because of dedication to exact registration of an image, as well as readability of typeface. Either that or you crack a mean whip. Keep it up.

Editorially, I see a well-balanced mix of stories, reviews and commentary. I'm curious to know if you'll be running poetry in the magazine in future issues.

A slight-left handed job, if you will: Please make sure that whoever tends the gluepot on the labeling machine uses a somewhat heavier hand—I almost didn't receive my first issue because the address label was hanging by a thread.

Thank you very much for your time, attention and interest. I would very much like to see the fantasy of a successful magazine devoted to the genre become a reality.

Ronald J. Potaczla

Thanks so much for your kind words about the magazine—and as soon as I'm done typing these letters, I'm going to crack my proverbial whip about the head and shoulders of the poor wretch huddled over his gluepot.

Hello, Shawna,

I read your editorial in the first issue with quiet amusement. The unanswerable question on the difference between science fiction and fantasy was asked (and answered). I wanted to share with you, though, the best definition I've read (though not as involved as your "order and chaos"). L.W. Currey, the noted rare bookseller of SF and fantasy said (to paraphrase): "Science fiction deals with what one day might be possible, fantasy with what could never be possible."

Doyne McElvain

Well, it sounds good at first—simple, elegant, and to the point. However, one is brought up short by the fact that it is almost universally agreed upon by scientists that a faster than light starship drive is impossible. Same thing for a working time machine. So, by your definition, most of what we consider to be science fiction is actually fantasy. Now what?

Dear Shawna,

Realms of Fantasy is a triumph! It's everything I could want in a fantasy magazine, and just what the market needed. The stories were an interesting assortment, and of the departments, I particularly enjoyed Terri Windling's "Folkroots." To me, real-world history, myth and legend are the wellspring of fantasy, and it pleases me to see our heritage being given the respect it deserves. It is my fervent and heartfelt wish that your magazine become phenomenally successful, financially as well as artistically, so that it can continue indefinitely and I can enjoy it forever. Thanks for doing it right.

Walter Rhoads

What can I say but, "Thank you." I share your wishes regarding the magazine's future, and I hope we'll all meet here again in twenty years.

Editor's Note: The copyright line accompanying Neil Gaiman's "Troll Bridge" in the last issue neglected to mention that the story first appeared in Snow White, Blood Red, edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, Avon Books, 1993.

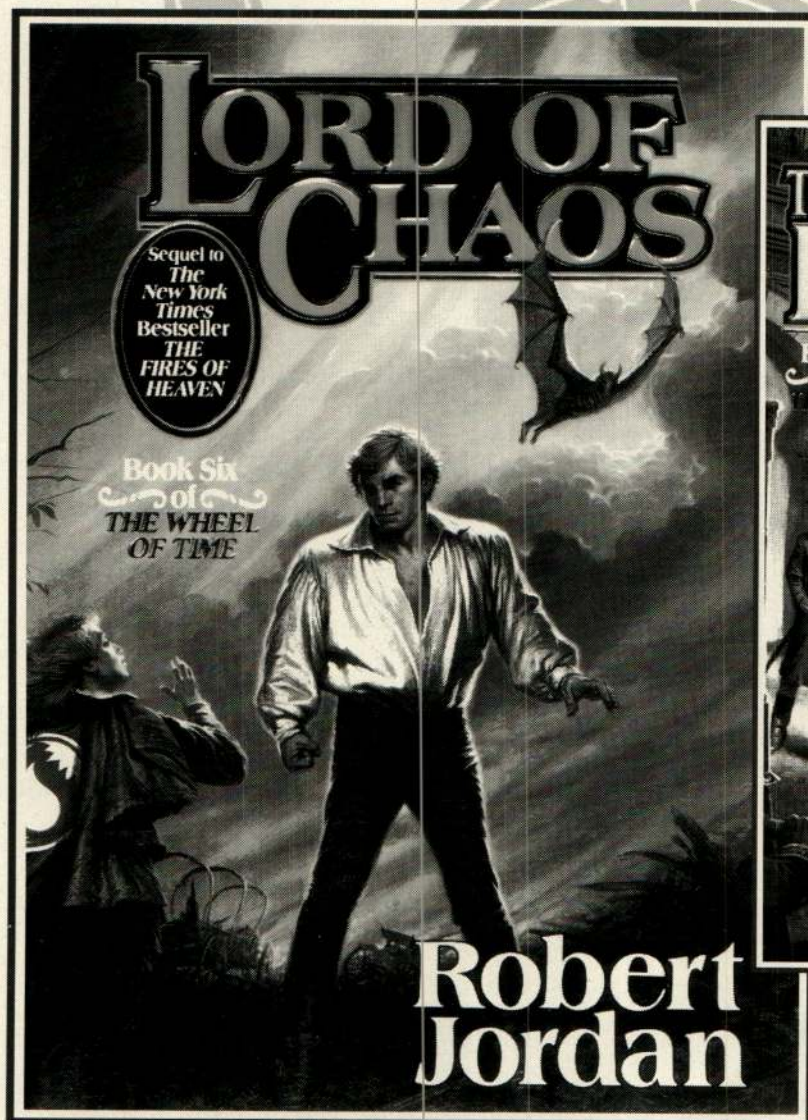
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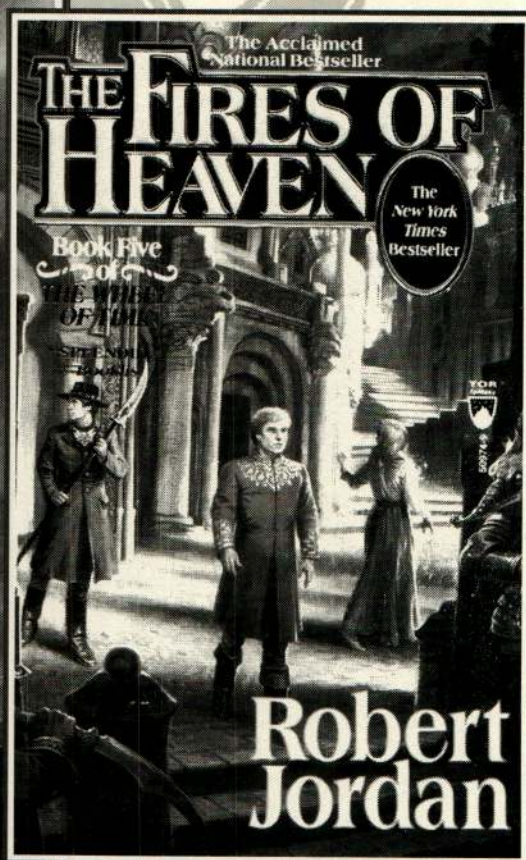
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TOR Books

BY SHAWNA MCCARTHY

Take one elf, one faery, a troll, a dragon and a pinch of magic: mix well.

WELL, WE MADE IT! THE PREMIERE ISSUE GOT OUT, GOT ON THE STANDS AND TO your homes when it was supposed to, and what can I do but paraphrase the immortal Sally Fields and say, "You like us! You really, really like us." It seems that you really, really do, and I can't tell you how pleased I am about this. (Well, I could, but I only have one page here.)

Many of your comments seem to be praising the "editorial mix" and balance of the first issue, so this seems to be as good a time as any to talk about the role of an editor and the personality of a magazine. What exactly does an editor do?

Well, there are several answers to that. For a book editor, the job consists of reading and selecting for publication novels that are well-written and (hopefully) commercial. Once you've decided you'd like to publish a book, you go over the plot and structure with the author till it sings like an angel and glows like a halogen lamp. You then, after having carefully paved the way with the marketing and sales forces, turn the finished book over to others and go on to the next project, which may or may not be anything like the one you've just finished. When the readers see it on the stands, they'll pick it up, or not, based on any number of factors, including cover art, rack placement, and cover copy. Since your name is almost never associated with the finished book, readers won't say, "Oh, a Herman Whitehead book. He's a really good editor and I've liked all his previous books, so I'll try this one." Each book sinks or swims on its own.

A magazine editor, though, has an entirely different job. His or her task is not only to select top-notch fiction and articles, but infuse the magazine as a whole with a personality. This is done in a number of ways, but it's most commonly reflected in the sorts of stories and articles selected. Some magazines feel solid and safe, even a little stuffy—there's nothing challenging or frightening about what you'll find in their pages. Some are so avant

garde that they can hardly hold still in your hands—the type twists around, the illos are disorienting, and you know as soon as you pick it up that you're in for a startling experience. Others fall into other categories, but you can be pretty certain that they all look and feel the way they do because that's what the editor and publisher like. The interesting thing about magazines, though, is that if you like one, and feel comfortable with it, it will take a lot to get you to stop reading it. You're willing to forgive the occasional bad story or boring column because the magazine as a whole speaks to you. Even if, heaven forbid, an entire issue should bore you, you're more than likely to buy at least two more just to make sure that it wasn't a fluke.

So, just the opposite of books, each issue builds on the reputation of the one that came before, and each is enormously ego-gratifying to the editor. His or her name is all over it, and everyone who reads it has no doubt that the magazine they hold in their hands reflects, for the most part, that editor's likes and dislikes. In the case of *RoF*, what you see reflects a synthesis of the publisher's and my tastes. I select the fiction and non-fiction, and he chooses the illos and the layout. Given that I have virtually no visual sense whatsoever, this is certainly a good thing. I suspect that if it were left up to me, the magazine would begin with a page of solid type and continue to the end with no text breaks at all.

Another interesting difference between books and magazines is, of course, what you're reading right now—the editorial. Book editors very seldom get to express their innermost thoughts about their work in the finished product. Here, however, I'm not only allowed, I'm required to communicate with you. This too is part of what makes up the magazine's feel—the presence of an editorial allows readers to recognize that there's a real, live human at the other side of the keyboard.

I think the resulting magazine provides a remarkably accurate insight into our personal tastes, and, I hope, a terrific vehicle for conveying to you the best in modern fantasy.

RoF reflects a synthesis of the publisher's and editor's tastes. Here you see your editor reclining amidst her assistants. Art by H.J. Ford.



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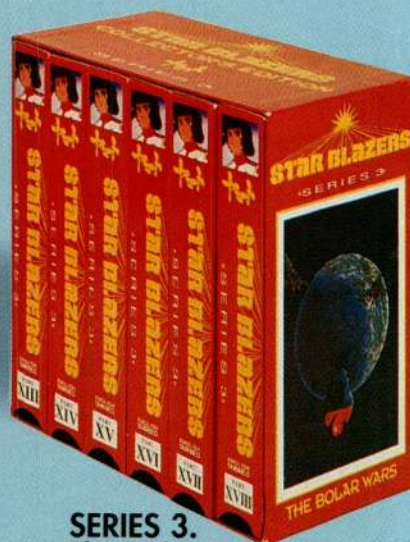
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BY GAHAN WILSON

A creepy horror novel, along with new fantasy favorites and fairy tales.

THE THING I FIND MOST TOUCHING AND APPEALING, AND AT THE SAME TIME MOST IRRITATING, about the folk in the contemporary occult grab bag labeled "New Age" is the benign view they take of the weird, oftentimes appalling, material they burrow into and play with so casually.

Take their spin on fairies, for example. Coming, as I do, very largely of Celtic stock, I have in my bones and in my mental hard-wiring a deep and abiding respect for the notion of faery. According to what I have read in Yeats and Gregory and Briggs, and from what I've heard for myself on the ground, my ancestors were always careful to speak of them as the Good People, or the Friendly Folk, or to use some other such term of endearment. They did not do this out of affection, but because they feared they might be overheard by little listeners in dark corners, such as lurk behind this word processor, and their comments taken unkindly.

The New Age, on the other hand, seems to assume a basic friendliness, a kind of reliable camaraderie on the part of fairies towards ourselves, their human neighbors. Their profound tricksiness is seen as a loveable and amusing quirk and their incomprehensible toying with children and wandering dreamers is viewed as an admittedly strangish but kindly meant way of granting us enlightenment.

Myself, I feel that this attitude—though doubtless well-intentioned and meant to be polite—is seriously lacking in real respect for the Good, the Very Good People. It cuts down their mystery in a truly spectacular fashion; its sentimentality reduces them to Hallmark figurines, and, worst of all, the pricking of my above-mentioned Celtic bones assures me that it is a foolhardy and dangerous way to approach such creatures even if—which is also highly possible—the only place where fairies lurk is in the wrinkling of our cerebrums.

Phil Rickman, the author of *Curfew* (Berkley Books, NY

625 pp., Paperback \$5.99)—an excellently creepy novel, owning a style and solidity which noticeably sets it apart from most of the other six-hundred-plus page horror books with which publishers crowd the genre shelves—seems to be of a like mind, only his concern regarding New Age optimism centers on the wonderful notion of ley lines, that fabulous enlargement of the theory of accupunctural meridians to a grand scale on the skin of this planet and to Great Britain in particular.

Of course the reader of a magazine such as *Realms of Fantasy* will more than likely be familiar with the history of the thing: how the gentlemen archaeologists of the 1600s pondered over the alignments of stone circles and burial mounds, and how their mullings were expanded by following scientists and by dowsers to take in churches and roadside crosses and pilgrims' routes until their combining notions presented us with the completed vision of all England webbed by connecting lines of ancient power.

As with the fairies, the New Age folk have with almost universal confidence assumed these lines to be positive in nature, and efforts on a small scale have actually been made to reconnect and charge them so that we may once again experience the benefits wrought by them upon the folk of yore.

Rickman's simultaneously amusing and scary book spins a cautionary tale of what happens when these real life attempts are dwarfed entirely by the spectacular plans of one Max Goff, a large, white-suited, Panama-hatted rock music multimillionaire who, as creator and head of Epidemic Records, keeps churning out one primo hit after the next and making far more money than even he can possible spend.

Max has read and lovingly absorbed all the New Age wisdom on ley lines he could get his hands on—his particular inspiration and favorite being *The Old Golden Land* by that grand old man of the ley movement, J. F. Powys—and his research has led him to borderland Wales, to the drear, cramped and dismal town of Crybbe where, with the aid of wise old dowser Henry Kettle and other living New Age legends which he has imported there from all points, he proposes to reestablish the lines of stones and turn that grim, grey little village into the glowing center of a New Age millennium, with himself, of course, as proprietor.

Fantasy lovers of the occult will enjoy *Curfew* and devotees of Arthurian legends must read *The Winter Prince* (Cover art by Darrell K. Sweet).



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Unfortunately for Max, the town's sullen locals do not share his cheery views regarding Crybbe's antique attractions. Through the generations they and their forefathers have burnt the standing stones to shale and removed them with a persistent animosity which has far exceeded the usual monolith-clearings of simple farmers trying for plowable fields and forward-looking town planners opening the way for straighter roads. Not satisfied with that, the determined Crybbians have also surrounded the local burial mound—a looming barrow known as the Tump—with a carefully constructed Victorian stone barrier, and at each and every dusk since the reign of the first Queen Elizabeth, a member of the Preece family has patiently climbed to the chapel and rang one hundred strokes of its bell to sound a solemn curfew against the dark forces of the night.

But this does not discourage Goff, nor does the ominous legend surrounding the doings of Black Michael, the High Sheriff who hanged what seemed an excessive number of citizens in the privacy of his enormous attic at Crybbe Court mostly, it would seem, so that he might carefully study them at the moment of their deaths thrashings in order to observe fine points regarding the escape-ment of their souls. Needless to say, Black Michael is said to haunt the area, but no one can say why he's chosen to do it in the form of an enormous, sable hound.

Involved in all sorts of interesting ways

with all of this is an extremely well-realized and rounded cast of characters, which provides you with something I've noticed becoming rarer and rarer in spooky meganovels of late: people you really hope the bogeyman won't get.

The essential point of view person turns out to be none other than J. M. Powys, the grand old man of leys, himself, who turns out to be not so old and—certainly in his opinion—far from grand. Lured into Goff's upbeat occult meddling by lots of money and the chance to finally break a year-long writers' block, Powys encounters a slew of interesting people, each one of whom is memorable and makes a telling point in Rickman's moral fable.

There is Fay Morrison, a reporter whose life has taken to spinning its wheels since she divorced her husband Guy, whose career is moving along like a rocket, but to no worthwhile destination; there's Fay's father, Canon Alex Peters (one of my favorites), a droll old fellow whose religious activities are being badly interfered with by the slow but inevitable ossification of his brain and by his incurable womanizing; and there is a particularly nice villain named Andy Boulton-Trow, the sort of nasty occult smoothie who makes you sincerely hope there really isn't anything to all this stuff. There are a generous number of others, ranging from the embattled, curfew-ringing Preece family, to Grace Legge, whose chillingly ladylike ghost grins with "brittle teeth" (somehow a very

shuddersome thought!), to none other than John Dee, the head spy, magician and court astrologer to Queen Elizabeth the First, and Rickman's extension of the good doctor's career is skillfully handled and has the smell of historical accuracy, even though, of course, we all know he made it up.

There are occasional short stretches when the action pauses perhaps a little too noticeably in explanation of some point or other, but altogether *Curfew* is happily lacking in the sort of flaws which are usually all too present in big, fat horror books such as extraneous shock scenes which are obvious fillers that diverge from and weaken the Big Bogle's impact, and the sort of mini side plots which do not advance the main story and have clearly been mostly introduced to pad the book. It's an excellent read and I look forward eagerly to Mr. Rickman's next chiller.

The Winter Prince, by Elizabeth E. Wein, Baen Books, 202 pp. Paperback, \$4.99.

Another kind of book altogether, a short one for one thing (only two hundred and two pages—God knows how it ever got published!!!), is *The Winter Prince* by Elizabeth E. Wein. It's a retelling of a section of the Arthurian saga, from the viewpoint of Welsh legends, and it strikes me as being a remarkable performance, particularly for a first novel.

The story's voice is that of Arthur's bastard child of incest, Mordred (Medraut in the book, as all the characters are called by their Welsh names), and his betwixt and between relations with his complicated and extraordinarily daunting parents, Arthur (here called Artos) and Arthur's sister, Morgawse (called Morgause).

The portrait of the usually totally inscrutable and mysterious Medraut does as good a job of fleshing him out into a convincingly motivated human as any treatment I've come across, and I don't think I've ever had a clearer look at Morgause and most certainly know for sure I've never seen her more frighteningly presented.

This last effect is in large part because Elizabeth Wein has not only used Medraut as her narrator, she's made the book an extended report from him to his fiendish mother, so that his constant references to her as "you" doubly force us to look at the terrifying creature, and to feel her tin hands, and to hear the chillingly subtle alterations of mood in her voice, from her abused son's point of view, which is the most fearsome one owned of her by any human on the planet. The ploy also enables Elizabeth Wein to make blood-chillingly clear the grisly effect which not only the presence but the merest passing thought of his horrendous mother has on her unfortunate son.

The book is sure and solidly structured, built with precision and economy and to the point. I even found the chapter headings to be particularly satisfactory, and the title also, referring as it does to a character in a ceremonial pageant celebrating the solstice who

BOOKS TO LOOK FOR

Shadow's End, by Sheri Tepper (Bantam). The enormously talented author of *Grass* and *The Gate Into Women's Country* among many others, returns with a tale that is science fictional in its setting but pure fantasy at its heart.

Love in Vein, by Poppi Z. Brite (HarperCollins). The remarkable Ms. Brite taps at our window with an anthology of vampire eroticism. Button up your collars, boys and girls!

The Flight of Michael McBride, by Midori Snyder (Tor Books). This talented author makes her hardcover fiction debut with a sprawling, involving fantasy set in nineteenth century Ireland, New York City, and the American West.

Dragon Moon, by Chris Claremont and Beth Fortschen, illustrated by John Bolton (Bantam). Chris Claremont, a legend in the comics industry, joins forces with writer-editor Beth Fleischer to create an all-new, fully illustrated fantasy universe.

Magic: The Gathering: Arena by William Fortschen (Harper). Fantasy fans such as yourselves will need no introduction to the world of *Magic: The*

Gathering. This first novel set in the card game's universe might well be a best-seller.

Lord of Chaos by Robert Jordan (Tor). If you're a fan of Jordan's, a group which is growing exponentially with each book released (and there are lots, for those of you new to Jordanmania), you won't want to miss his latest.

Caliban's Hour, by Tad Williams (HarperCollins). The best-selling author of *Tail-Chaser's Song* returns with this slim but powerful new novel.

Travellers in Magic by Lisa Goldstein (Tor). I must admit that the publishers didn't tell me very much about about this title, but nothing the American Book Award-winning Goldstein writes is less than involving. If you've never read her, why not take a chance?

Christmas Magic edited by David Hartwell (Tor). And finally, to celebrate the holiday magic that's ringing in the air, Tor Books' redoubtable David Hartwell returns with his annual collection of Christmas fantasy tales, this year entitled *Christmas Magic*. These volumes are always entertaining, and make great gifts for fantasy-loving friends.

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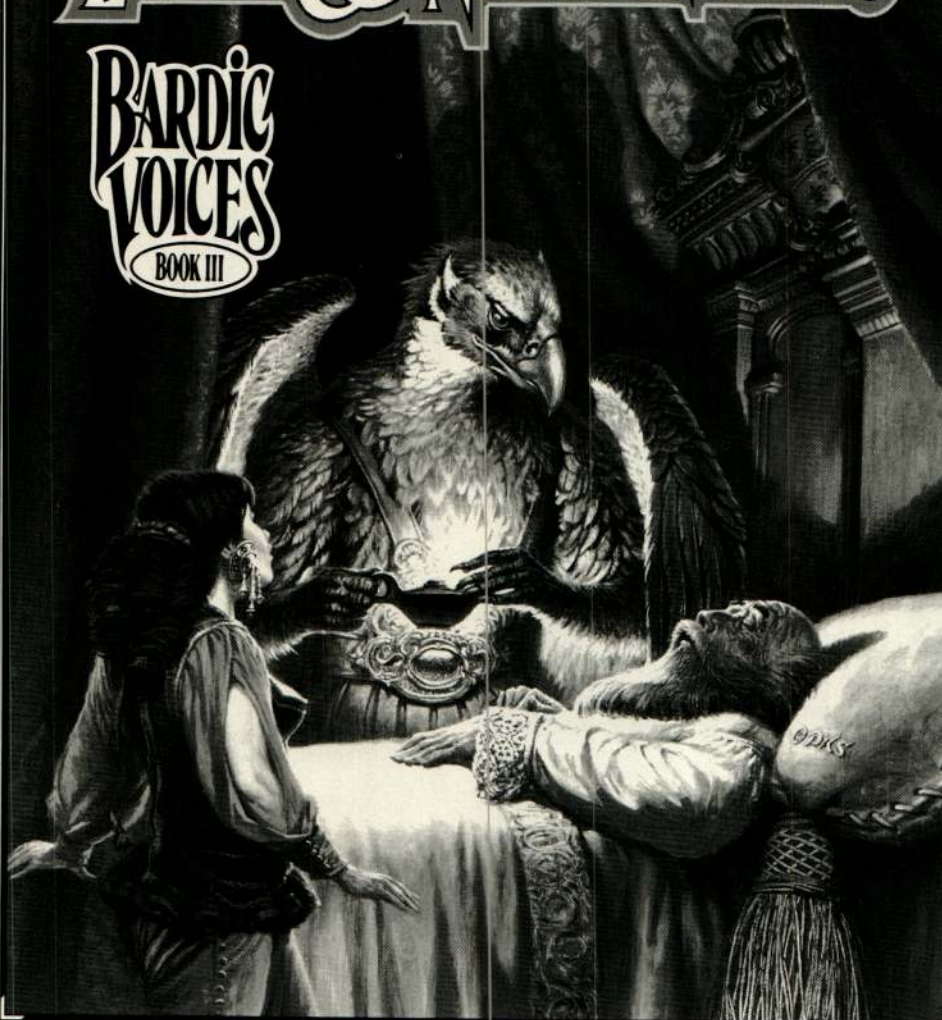


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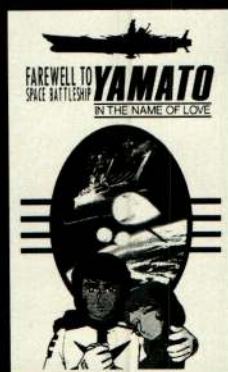
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is adroitly relevant. Altogether the plot unfolds with such a revealing stateliness that it put me in mind of a Shakespearean play.

Slowly, with much subtle detailing, we see Medraut, almost to his surprise, succeeding in blending into the court of Artos. His heart swells with fierce joy as he finds his father treating him as a beloved and respected son. He discovers that his jealousy of Llew, Arto's son by marriage and the obviously correct heir to the throne, is mitigating and, for the first time, becoming manageable to him. It seems at last that their complicated family situation may actually be worked out after all, that a lasting solution may yet be grasped.

But then Morgause appears and if you, dear reader, do not find chills running up and down your spine at the delicacy of her sadism and the aesthetic perfection of her vile machinations, then you are made of sterner stuff than I. Really, the mood of her whole visit is so sophisticatedly nasty that I'm put in mind of a playwright, one particularly gifted at depicting the attractive ironies of smoothly decadent evil, the great Lord Dunsany, with whom, I'm sure you are thoroughly familiar.

I won't go into the plot any further, because it is full of excellent and instructive turns and twists and I wouldn't want to spoil any of its expanding revelations.

Black Thorn, White Rose, edited by Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling, Avon books, 386 pp., Hardcover, \$22.00.

The structure of the classic fairy tale is surely one of the most pleasing literary forms ever created. It unfolds with a lovely naturalness, marches in a smooth, sprightly way from its highly promising start to its highly satisfactory finish, and provides the lucky author with a chance to effectively coat the bitterest, most acerbic moral point he wishes to make (and the preachments of fairy tales are oftentimes extraordinarily stern!) with the most delightful marzipan his language—French, German, English or whatever—can provide.

The most famous classics among them are without contest those adapted or created by the legendary specialists such as Charles Perrault, the brothers Grimm, and Hans Christian Andersen, or with later experts in the field such as George MacDonald, E. Nesbit and L. Frank Baum, but the pull of the fairy tale current has tugged many a renowned author at least momentarily from the mainstream. Oscar Wilde, of course (who wrote some of the saddest ever); Charles Dickens (his *Captain Murderer* may be the funniest fairy tale parody of them all); William Butler Yeats and the rest of those other lovely Irish people; Ford Maddox Ford and dear old Mark Twain, bless his heart, whose *Mysterious Stranger* absolutely gets my personal nomination for the most effective lingeringly-depressing fairy tale even penned by man or woman. And that last, considering the field, is no small achievement!

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Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling have produced a sequel to their highly successful first collection of modern fairy tales, *Snow White, Blood Red* with a second anthology: *Black Thorn, White Rose*, and these two formidable editors have not let their magical banner touch the ground. As before, they have allowed their contributors to follow their joy where it will into faery. All styles and forms and extravagancies of adaptation are permitted so long as they work the charm and stay at least more or less within the circle of evocation as drawn by the original, inspiring tale. Extensions of that circle are freely permitted, as is layering and interlocking with other, authentically charged circles so long as the effect is convincing and attractive and makes a feasible point.

Let me clearly state at the outset that the stories and poems in this book are all very good (Datlow and Windling are both nice people, but they are also both extremely hard-nosed editors and I've yet to see anything second rate sneak by them) and I would praise them all if I had the space. It is excellent work from the first page to the last.

Peter Straub in "Ashputtle" gently wafts the Cinderella motif into regions of horror it has not seen before, at least not in my presence. Straub is getting so much better with each and every word he writes that I suspect heavenly angels are beaming him steadily with rays of inspiration. God knows what he will eventually come up with, but brace

yourself. The dark heroine and narrator of Ashputtle, an enormous kindergarten teacher who I guarantee will stir ghastly recollections in your mind, weaves her story around you like a spider weaves her web, and by the time she's done with it, you will find yourself trussed up amongst her victims. She explains various techniques she uses on her little students: the employment of the magic phrase, "OR ELSE!", the instructive effects of sudden darkness. She lobs mad, hideously haunting little aphorisms at you: "Hatred is the inside part of love" so that they may fester forever after in your brain. On the other hand she gives you marvelous and extremely useable advice such as "To be lived truly, life must be apprehended with an adventurous state of mind." Horror is so complicated.

Roger Zelazny's contribution, "Godson," is a gentler sort of story altogether even though it is entirely about death, or, as Death himself puts it: "Mine is a power over life, and vice versa. We're sort of 'yin-yang' that way." But just when you think you've got a line on Death, Zelazny pulls you off in another direction until you're really not too sure of anything about him except that he's a great backer of the Falcon's football team, and I suppose that's philosophically as tenable a position as any other I've heard on the subject.

"Sweet Bruising Skin" by Storm Constantine is a gently sinister variant on the Princess

and the Pea which grows darker by the page and offers a whole new reason why the Princess bruised so easily. Somnus' "Fair Maid" by Ann Downer is a sweet period evocation with a nice golden glow I found quite heart-warming. "The Black Swan" by Susan Wade is both funny and touching and has a heroine who will clomp right into your heart. "The Goose Girl" explores the same theme in an entirely different way and with an altogether sadder ending. I'll end by stating yet again that all the stories and poems are well worth your time and also by mentioning the story with which the anthology begins: "Words Like Pale Stones" by Nancy Kress, which is a fine variant on "Rumpelstiltskin" that also does a good, tough job of exploring various painful aspects of being a creative person. Turns out it's not so easy after all.

The H.P. Lovecraft Dream Book, edited by S.T. Joshi, Will Murray & David E. Schultz, Necronomicon Press, 42 pp, Paper, \$6.50.

This interesting chapbook is typical of the publications of the Necronomicon Press of Rhode Island, an enterprising outfit that has, through the years, brought out an amazingly varied series of small but very scholarly publications which have concentrated mainly on macabre fantasy, particularly those associated in some way with Lovecraft, but which have by no means excluded the other aspects of fantastic literature.

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Many authors have confessed a heavy debt to their dreams but few to such a truly bizarre extent as H. P. Lovecraft. He was plagued from childhood on by nightmares of appalling strength and force. Very early on he began to record them, and as the years passed and he became a compulsive writer of long and complex letters, he would pass on these recollections of his dreams to his various correspondents.

This book is a careful collection of the dreams mentioned in those letters. Some of them are excerpted from the five volumes of his collected letters published by Arkham House, others have been reprinted from different sources, and some are here in print for the very first time.

The book has a very interesting and informative introduction and is copiously annotated. It provides a truly remarkable record of H.P.L.'s dreams and ought to be of great interest to anyone seriously interested in why people write fantasy, what psychic materials inspire it, and how those raw materials are refined by the writer and turned to art. For the Lovecraft completist, of course, it is an absolute must.

As a further note on the Necronomicon Press, besides publishing books such as the one reviewed above, they publish a series of high quality magazines which are small but packed with essays and fiction and all sorts of material relevant to fantasy. Those interested in further information regarding cata-

logues and so on, can contact them in West Warwick, Rhode Island.

Gahan Wilson

The Forest House, by Marion Zimmer Bradley, Viking, 417 pages, \$21.95.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's new book returns readers to Britain, the land of her best-selling *Mists of Avalon*. Instead of the seventh-century England of Arthur, however, *The Forest House* is set in the first century, when the Roman Empire occupied and struggled to subdue the "barbarians" of Britannia. Bradley uses this historical setting to weave a web of magic and human struggle in a worthy successor to her earlier works.

On the surface, *The Forest House* is the tale of an ill-fated love affair between Eilan, granddaughter of the powerful arch-Druid, and Gaius Macellius Severus, a young Roman officer. Their passion for each other influences their separate paths through life and, in the course of the story, results in crucial moments together which will affect the fate of both Romans and Britons. But *The Forest House* is more than a simple retelling of ill-fated love, as the author follows Eilan's life within the Forest House of Vernemeton, where the Druidic priestesses practice the ancient rites of learning and prophecy. During the course of Eilan's rise to a position of high power (and Gaius' more mundane climb up the Roman career ladder), we also get to know their relatives and acquaintances,

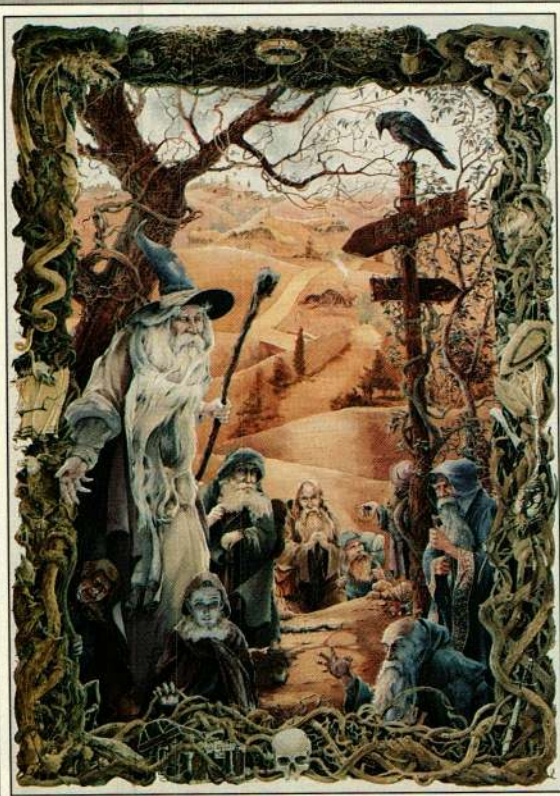
plus a cast of historical figures ranging from the Roman Emperor Domitian to "the Killer Queen" Boudicca. The author's careful attention to character and detail results in a rich melange of human actions and emotions which add a vivid reality to the magical tale.

For magic is indeed present throughout the book, from the vivid dream of the prologue, to the soul-searing climax of prophecy and death during the Samaine festival. The magic is placed naturally within the story, accepted without explanation as uncertain but very real expressions of the Goddess. It joins other influences, ranging from Roman politics to the development of early Christianity, in affecting the daily lives of Britannia's inhabitants. Lovers of fantasy might yearn for even more magic within *The Forest House*, but Marion Zimmer Bradley places her emphasis on the very real—and very human—people within her novel. Bradley is especially adept at exploring relations between men and women, and among the women themselves. Indeed, the friendship between Eilan and the older priestess Caillean is one of the most stirring and thoughtful elements of *The Forest House*.

Bradley has attracted a devoted following to her Darkover series, her retelling of myths, and other works. *Forest House's* combination of magic, history, and people will reward dedicated fans and new readers alike.

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Anne Rice's Interview With The Vampire will satisfy moviegoers' darkest hungers.

IF YOU WERE IN THE SAME SITUATION, YOU MIGHT THINK THIS WAS THE EASY PART: PICK UP THE rights to Anne Rice's certified blockbuster, *Interview with The Vampire*; bring on a production team that boasts a celebrated director, top-drawer technical personnel, and more high-quality acting talent than Wolfgang Puck could shake a free-range pizza at; then place the finished product before a waiting public. No muss, no fuss; just kick back and wait for the box office receipts to roll in.

Guess again. For while the producers of *Interview With The Vampire* have seen everything pretty much slot into place for their upcoming theatrical feature, they've gotten more than their share of grief over the actor eventually selected to play the cruel, charismatic instigator of much of the film's action, Lestat. From day one, many of the book's most ardent fans have pushed for the cerebrally seductive likes of a Daniel Day Lewis to be cast in the role. But Tom Cruise wanted the part, and Tom Cruise got the part, and there—as far as *Interview's* more vocal partisans were concerned—was where the dream ended. Tom Cruise, eh? Handsome? Yes. Charming? True. Lestat? Well... Not helping matters any was Anne Rice herself, who caught wind of Cruise's casting and immediately began dissing the selection to anyone who cared to listen.

For *Interview With The Vampire* producer Stephen Wooley, the author's outspokenness smacked less of artistic integrity than of sheer self-advancement. "One has to remember that she was publicizing her new book at the time. All the comments and all the fury surrounding the casting didn't hinder her book sales, I'm sure; certainly she became a media celebrity during her promotional

tour of America at the time. It's just a bit disrespectful of all of us to think we're going to accept Tom Cruise because he's a big star. An awful lot of thought went into this casting, an awful lot of thought, and if we pull it off with the film, and I believe we have, I think people will come out going, 'Wow, I never thought Tom Cruise could do that.' That's what good actors are, they can be chameleons, and they can create different kinds of roles.

With Ms. Rice's blessings or not, *Interview With The Vampire* is on its way this fall to a multiplex near you. Produced under the auspices of David Geffen's production company and Warner Brothers, the film boasts the directing talent of *The Crying Game's* Neil Jordan (who will also share credit for the screenplay with Ms. Rice), and has gathered before the camera such top-line performers as Brad Pitt in the role of Louis, Stephen Rea as Santiago, Antonio Banderas as Armond, and Christian Slater as the Interviewer. Director Jordan's first big-budget, major studio production, *Interview With The Vampire* spared no expense in bringing Rice's century-spanning tale of night-predators to the screen, incorporating into its mix of horror and doomed romanticism the elaborate makeup effects of Stan Winston, and location shoots in such venues as London, Paris and, of course, New Orleans.

"This isn't *Dracula*," explained Wooley, who has previously worked with Jordan on such highly praised productions as *The Crying Game*, *Mona Lisa*, and *The Company of Wolves*. "This isn't about garlic and crosses. There's still some of the vampire legend: there's still the sunlight, there's still the flame, there's still certain things that can kill or harm a vampire. But we've taken away from the Bram Stoker religious context of Europe and placed it more firmly into the Biblical, legendary sense that Anne created for her book. It isn't *Dracula*, it isn't *The Fearless Vampire Killers*, it isn't *Nosferatu*, it isn't a Hammer horror film. It's all of those things in a way, because they're all films I admire, but it really is a different kind of animal, and it will stand or fall on being—as the book was—a far more melodramatic and far more sweeping view of immortality. It's about how you cope when the world around you is dying and you're not getting any older. It's a meditation on that as much as anything else.

"It's also a meditation on how you bring yourself to kill every night. Obviously, there's an impulse to kill, a passion to kill, but if you fight that, then the desire to kill

Tom Cruise positively embraces the role of Lestat. In this scene he kills Claudia's mother, before prompting Louis to give Claudia new life as a vampire.





"The Silver Nereid"

It was the nereid Cora, one of the fifty daughters of King Nereus, who gave her name to the Coral Seas and the myriad small creatures that built the reefs that fringe the tropic seas. Cora lived in a coral palace and is said to have dined on sea foam and pearls. She is known as the protectress of sailors and fishermen, and for her enchanting song. Her insignia is the seahorse and she is especially fond of the fairy basslets that play hide and seek in her shining hair. She is seen here in her own silver and coral sea in a Dance of the Tides.

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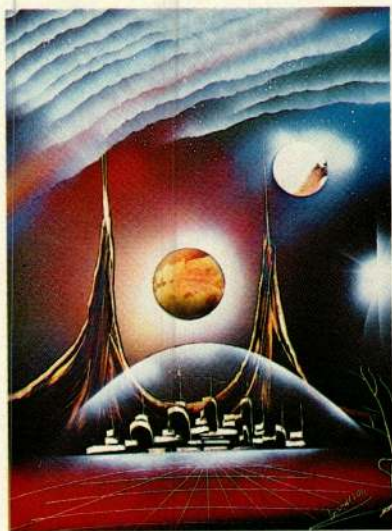
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Fellow vampire Santiago (Stephen Rea) despises Louis' human tendencies.

becomes something which is closer to an animal. It's the playing off of that feeling—in the book and in the film—which I think is not quite what you get in those other movies. It's not a spoof. There's a huge amount of comedy in the film, it's very funny, and we know that there are periods of the film where people find it very amusing indeed. But the comedy comes out of those predicaments. It doesn't come out of a smart, '90s kind of hip view of vampires, it comes out of the actual, organic problems of trying to survive without kinpeople and drinking the blood of animals. Those kinds of things aren't really explored in the other *Draculas*."

The greatest challenge, Wooley admits, is to win an audience's empathy for creatures who have traditionally been cast as villains: "The trick is that these characters are monsters and not, in a sense, human beings anymore. You could potentially have characters that people don't care for. The trick of the book is that Louis doesn't give up being a human being or try to hold on to it. That's hopeless there.

"This is quite a daring, controversial movie to make. It isn't a walk in the park, it's a huge challenge to see how you could translate some of the very vivid and exotic imagery in the book onto the screen, especially such things as the young girl [child-vampire Claudia, played by *Sister's* Kirsten Dunst] performing such evil acts and being involved in this strange *ménage à trois* with these two men. It was a very difficult puzzle to solve. We've come at this with a not overly Hollywood or American view. I'm English, Neil is Irish, our cameraman is French, our designer is Italian, our special effects person is American. It was a real conglomerate there, even on the acting side. There was Brad and Christian and Tom, but there was also Antonio Banderas and Stephen Rea. There was a different sensibility at play—we've come from

not a slick angle, we've come from slightly a less fast viewpoint."

Lightening the burden somewhat was Warner Brother's willingness to give the filmmakers their heads, with minimal interference from the front office. Said Wooley of this freedom, especially uncharacteristic given a story teeming with unconventional eroticism and a production that, by anyone's standards, has been as high-profile as they come, "We've been fortunate enough to have the backing of a studio and an individual like David Geffen who have been completely encouraging in our taking this particular direction. We were very fortunate with *Interview With The Vampire* in terms of that process, because [the studio] realized that by hiring Neil, they weren't taking on a gun-for-hire, they were taking someone whose success has grown out of a particular auteurist take on things—and I use that word guardedly, because I'm not really a subscriber to the auteur theory. In terms of Neil, he has a sensibility that he brings to a project that you have to accept. I think that they were so excited by his take on the script and so excited by the dailies, that we had a great relationship with the studio.

"I kind of went into this holding my breath and thinking, Any day, now, we're going to get the nightmare horror story. I've experienced the independents of the world and have hundreds of horror stories, from interference to holding back funds to fiddling in the cutting room. [On *Interview*,] we've been able to keep pretty much to ourselves. David Geffen has been a very integral part of the making of this film, and his support of the film has been incredible, so we haven't had that experience. In a way, I kind of feel frustrated—the masochistic side of me says, 'How come no one came down with a cane?' They just never did."

Interview With The Vampire is currently slated for release in November. Time enough, one supposes, for a reconciliation with Lestat's creator. Wooley, though, remains guarded in his hopes that Ms. Rice will embrace their adaptation of her book. "I'm inclined to believe she will change her mind when she sees the film. I really, really hope that she does like the film, but having said that, she's Anne Rice. The fact that the author of *Jurassic Park* doesn't like what happens in the movie or doesn't think it's as good as it could be is irrelevant to the box office figures; the fact that *Rebecca* is probably a better movie than the book is irrelevant. Books are kind of like jumping-off points for a film—it's impossible to translate a whole book to film. Somebody's worried about the casting of a film? Let them worry when the film doesn't work. You have to reserve judgment, you have to accept that the experience of David Geffen, Neil Jordan, Warner Brothers and Tom Cruise combined is enough for us to say that when you've seen the film, you should speak your mind. But until you've seen the film, don't pre-judge." ■

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BY TERRI WINDLING

Fantasy literature and folk music have their roots in old Celtic ballads.

THERE ONCE WAS A KING IN THE EAST COUNTRY WHO COURTED A LADY IN THE WEST. They wed, and they were happy together until one day the queen went out walking and fell asleep beneath a tree. When she woke, she was wild-eyed and full of grief. The King of Faery had come to her, riding on his milk white steed, and had told her to bid goodbye to her lands. The next day he'd come back to claim her, whether she

wanted him or not.

The next day the queen stood waiting with one thousand of her husband's finest knights standing guard. But she was spirited away right from their midst, and no one could say where she had gone. After this, the king went mad with loneliness and sorrow. He put his lands in the care of his steward and went into the woods alone, barefoot, with nothing but his clothes and his harp upon his back. Music was his only solace, and even the birds and animals would stop to listen to him play.

One day the king saw some ladies who were hawking in the woodlands—and among them was his own dear wife. He hid himself and followed them; and at last they came to a great castle, fairer than any he'd ever seen. He knocked at the gate and told the porter that he was a minstrel come to play for the lord. He went into the great hall and came before the throne.

"What man art thou?" asked the Faery King. "I never sent for thee, and never found I a man so bold as to come here unbidden."

"Lord," said King Orfeo, "I am but a poor musician, and I have come here for to play." Saying this, he took up his harp and began to perform for the company. All the court came to listen, lying down at his feet.

First he played bright songs of joy. Then he played songs of sorrow and pain. Last he played "The Faery Reel," and the faeries were so pleased with him that the Faery King said, "Minstrel, ask of me whatever it will be, and I will pay thee largely."

"Then let me take my Lady Isabel away," said King Orfeo, revealing he was no minstrel at all.

"Nay," said the Faery lord, "choose something else, for thou art lean and rough and black, and she is lovely and has no lack." But he'd given his word. The Faery King had to let the Lady Isabel free, or else he would have been foresworn and shamed before humankind. And so where the swords of a thousand knights had failed, the music of one man triumphed. For it is said the faeries love music more than food, wine, or life itself....

The story of King Orfeo, reminiscent of the medieval romance "Orpheus," is not a romance itself, or a fairy tale, or the plot of a paperback fantasy novel. It is a song—sung by minstrels over seven hundred years ago and still performed by musicians today. In folk clubs, concert halls, and the back rooms of pubs across the British Isles, fiddlers are still playing "the songs of joy and the songs of pain"; harpers still play "The Faery Reel." And these magical songs have emigrated across the Atlantic to inspire a modern generation of musicians—and of writers and artists as well.

In North America, the English-language folk music tradition comes primarily from British, Scottish and Irish roots. This music had a strong revival in popular interest in the 1970s; many of us owe our love of Celtic music to the influential folk bands of the period: Steeleye Span, Fairport Convention, Pentangle, and harpists Robin Williamson and Alan Stivell. These musicians adapted ancient tunes to modern, electric instruments, introducing folk music on both sides of the Atlantic to a generation who'd grown up on rock-and-roll.

At the same time, bands and performers like De Danann, Planxty, June Tabor, and Martin Carthy were creating an audience for traditional music played in more traditional ways. In Brittany, the north of Scotland, the west of Ireland, and other Celtic strongholds, this was all part of a larger cultural movement to reclaim the history, languages, myths and folk roots of Great Britain's Celtic past. It was during this time—when mythological scholarship began to flourish, Arthurian

From the ballad "King Henry" adapted from the original by Jane Yolen, art by Charles Vess for the comic anthology Dark Horse Presents.



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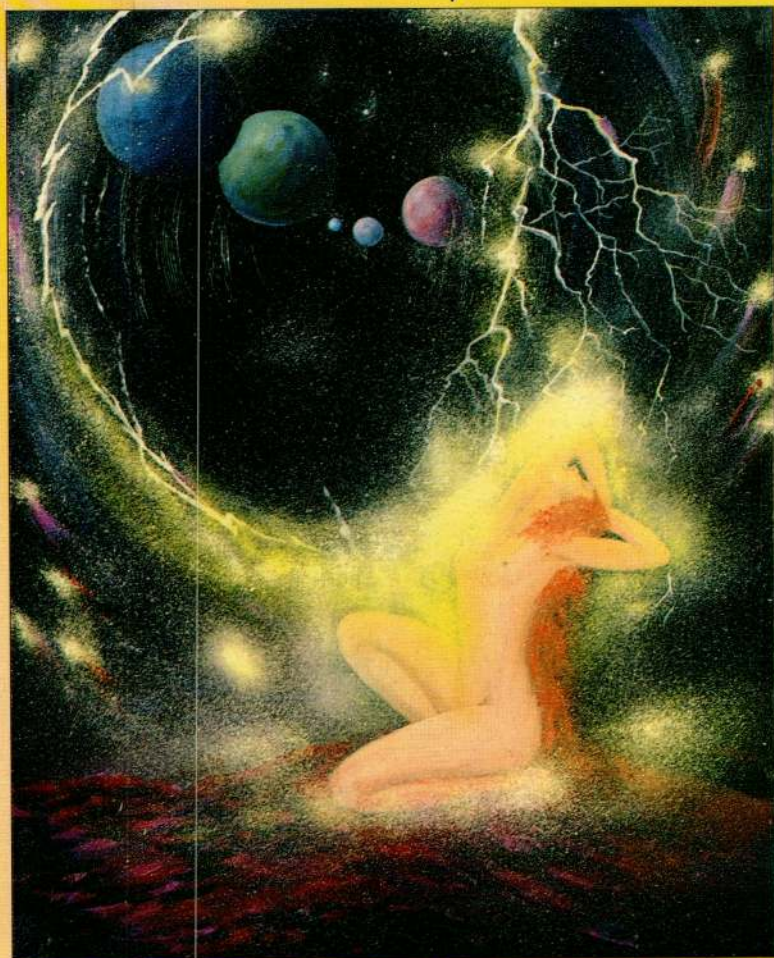
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studies became popular reading, and young musicians picked up the Celtic harp and ballads like "King Orfeo" were sung once more, accompanied by electric guitar—that fantasy literature emerged as a popular genre. In the 1970s, the works of J.R.R. Tolkien became best-sellers, and Lin Carter's *Sign of the Unicorn* series brought classic fantasy literature back into print. Ever since that time there has been a link between fantasy literature and folk music. The audiences for both often overlap, and it is not difficult to understand why. Old folk ballads and new fantasy tales are both drawn from the same deep well of folk history, folk ways, myths, and stories that are the heritage of all English-speaking peoples.

The modern interest in Celtic ballads is made possible by the scholarly work begun in the eighteenth century, during an earlier revival of folk music. Until that time, traditional ballads were passed down orally through the generations—added to, embellished, or forgotten altogether, according to the tastes of the singers and of the times. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, men like Bishop Percy and Sir Walter Scott began to collect this material from the old people and the traveling people (the gypsies). They published their work and thereby preserved innumerable ballad lyrics that would surely have been lost. At one point Percy stumbled upon a treasure trove of lyrics written down by an earlier collector that were being used as fire lighters; he rescued them, anguishing at the thought of all the ballads already fed to the flames.

In the late nineteenth century, Sir Francis Child published his great work, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, an enormous compendium of traditional lyrics that is still the standard reference volume—and a treasure trove of magical tales. Ballads—like myths, epics, and fairy tales—are part of that great simmering Soup of Story from which modern writers of fantasy have taken nourishment and inspiration. One need only dip at random into the thick pages of the five Child volumes in order to discover why.

There you will find the ballad of "Kemp Owyne", in which a young woman is turned into a loathsome dragon. Knight after knight comes to slay the beast; the dragon kills them all in turn, with tears of regret on her scaly cheeks. It is only when her own true love comes and wisely puts down his sword, kissing her thrice on her horrible face, that the spell is broken and the princess is turned back into a beautiful young maid.

In "Twa Sisters", a knight courts the dark eldest sister, but his heart belongs to the fair youngest. The dark girl invites the fair one to come walk with her beside the strand. There she pushes her sister in, and despite the girl's pleas for mercy, she calmly watches as her sister drowns. Later, a minstrel walks upon the beach and the body of a young maid floats to land. He makes a harp of her breast bone, and strings it with her yellow hair. He is hired to play at the dark girl's



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wedding—but when the harp begins to play, it tells the tale of her evil deed.

In "Reynardine", a mysterious man accosts and seduces a woman as she walks among the hills. The man is a shape-changer, a werefox. We don't know what he will do to her in the castle where he steals her away, but our last image of Reynardine is of his sharp teeth gleaming brightly in the twilight.

Not all ballads in the Celtic folk tradition concern magic, faery or the supernatural. Other common themes are love (usually tragic); death (usually gruesome); and family troubles that make the soap operas of our own age pale by comparison: "What is that blood on your sword, my son, what is that blood my dear-o? It's the blood of my sister, Mother, who I have killed in the greenwood-o..." (In this song, the brother is trying to avoid discovery of the fact that he's made his sister pregnant.)

As I began to gather material for this article, I had a dinner table discussion that included folk singer June Tabor and musician Mark Emerson (formerly of Pye Wackett, now performing with June), we made a list of ballads with fantasy elements—and discovered that geography plays a part in determining the amount of magic to be found in the old songs. Ireland, that land of silver-tongued poets and the silver-haired "sidhe" (the Irish faery folk, pronounced "she"), has relatively few supernatural ballads compared to England and Scotland;

while in America, the supernatural elements in the songs are often stripped out altogether, as in the songs where faery fiddlers are replaced with a fiddle-playing Devil.

The best place to find magical balladry is in the Border Country between England and Scotland. From that lovely, much-disputed land, with its complex and brutal history, come some of the best known and most evocative songs: "Tam Lin", "Thomas the Rhymer", "Sweet William's Ghost", "The Broomfield Hill", "Willie's Lady", "The Elfin Knight", "Twa Sisters", "Kemp Owyne", "The Daemon Lover". (Fans of traditional music may be interested to know that June Tabor is currently working on a project concerning women in the Border ballads, along with harpist Savorna Stevenson.)

Some years ago I traveled the Border Country along with fantasy author Jane Yolen, who has used ballad themes to great effect in several of her books. These are: "Tam Lin" in the picture book of the same name, "Kemp Owyn" in the picture book *Dove Isabeau*; "The Grey Selchie" in the collection *Neptune Rising*. In *Sister Light, Sister Dark*, Yolen creates her own ballads, which read nonetheless like songs handed down through many, many years. We were searching for Carterhaugh, the enchanted wood of the ballad "Tam Lin", and we found it, above the river Yarrow (a name evocative of another well-known ballad). Despite a modern housing estate tucked among those

Selkirk hills, I still felt unexpectedly moved by the sight of that haunted green land.

"Tam Lin" has captured the imagination of more fantasy authors and artists than any other single ballad, perhaps because of its sensual theme and unusual hero: an independent, courageous, stubborn young woman, pregnant with her woodland lover's child, determined to save him from the Faery Queen and the unearthly Faery Court. Most people know the ballad from the Fairport recording, but Pye Wackett has also recorded it in a lovely version considerably less electric; Frankie Armstrong has recorded a whole cycle of songs around the Tam Lin legend; and a rather dreadful English movie was made, redeemed only by its Pentangle soundtrack.

Pamela Dean's novel, *Tam Lin*, uses the ballad as the basis of a contemporary, richly literate coming-of-age tale set among theater students at a midwestern college. Elizabeth Marie Pope's retelling, *The Perilous Gard*, set in Elizabethan Scotland, is one of the best young adult fantasy novels written today. Dahlav Ipcar used the ballad in her novel *A Dark Horn Blowing*; Joan Vinge retells it in her short story "Tam Lin", in the anthology *Imaginary Lands* (edited by Robin McKinley). And I strongly recommend Diana Wynne Jones' novel *Fire and Hemlock*, which beautifully weaves together "Tam Lin" and "Thomas the Rhymer" into a contemporary English tale.

Jane Yolen continued her exploration of

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the Scottish borders along with Ellen Kushner when Ellen was writing her version of the ballad *Thomas the Rhymer*. Together they found the ancient Rhymer's Tower behind a place called (what else?) the *Rhymer's Cafe*. The rolling land of the Eildon Hills (where Thomas encounters the Queen of Faery, becomes her lover, and must serve her for seven years) has found its counterpart in the rolling, mythic landscape of Ellen's World Fantasy Award-winning novel. I recently spoke with Ellen about how she came to write *Thomas the Rhymer*. At that time, a series of novels based on ballads was in the works, a series which never came to fruition. "I had to do Thomas. I didn't want anyone else to do it," she recalls, "because, like every other writer, I knew Thomas was *my* story. He holds the mythic power of King Arthur in the hearts of poets: the artist who is literally seduced by his muse, comes closer to her than any human should to the source of his art, and is profoundly changed. He can never be at home in this world again, and yet he must continue to live in it. That's how every writer feels, I think.

Ellen is a folk singer as well as a writer (she has performed a musical version of her novel with June Tabor in London); she knows the old material well and the book is rich with ballad themes. "The Trees Grow High" inspired the last third of the novel; the middle section, set in Faery, makes use of the ballad "The Famous Flower of Serving Men". "Famous Flower" is the story of a woman whose husband has been slain by thieves hired by her own mother. She dons men's clothes and joins the king's court, while the murdered man returns to earth as a dove, shedding blood red tears through the forest.

Delia Sherman's excellent first novel, *Through a Brazen Mirror*, is also based on this evocative song. "I heard Martin Carthy's version of 'Famous Flower'," Delia told me, "and it haunted me with questions. If a mother so hated her child, why not just kill her and be done? I also started wondering about cross-dressing in a medieval culture. And the third could be stated as: In all these ballads with girls dressed as boys, the man falls in love with the boy, not the girl. What would happen if he weren't relieved to discover his beloved's true sex? In short, 'Famous Flower' gave me a beautiful, mysterious narrative framework upon which to hang all my favorite concerns: gender confusion, different kinds of love, the single-mindedness of the mad, and foundlings and their origins."

I asked Delia if she had a theory about why certain writers found ballad material so compelling, returning to it again and again. "What I like best about ballads," she said, "is that they're plots with all the motivations left out. Why did Young Randall's stepmother want to poison him? Why choose eels? Why did Randall eat them (especially if they were green and yellow)? There's a novel there, or at least a short story. Ballads give you classi-

cal human situations, and also some decidedly unclassical ones, exploring relationships between lovers, parents and children, between friends, masters and servants. Many of them deal with power and powerlessness, which is one of the central themes of fairy tales too, but it seems to me that ballads are more pragmatic, more realistic, in their denouements. Not every villain gets his/her just desserts.

Charles de Lint is a Celtic folk musician as well as a fantasy writer, and thus his books are permeated with ballads, tunes, and folk musician protagonists—particularly his charming and magical Cornish novel *The Little Country*.

Emma Bull is also both a writer and musician; she uses folk tunes and a seductive faery fiddler in her lauded urban fantasy novel *War for the Oaks*. The *Borderland* urban fantasy series (with stories by de Lint, Bull, Kushner and others) is so filled with balladry and music there is almost an audible soundtrack to the tales.

If you are searching for ballad-related material, be sure to look for the Ballad Comics series created by artist Charles Vess. Charles is a gifted artist whose work is beautifully reminiscent of the sainted Arthur Rackham; and he has asked several writers to pen scripts based on ballads for a series of graphic retellings. The first two of these—*Yarrow* by Charles de Lint and *King Henry* by Jane Yolen—have been published in the comic anthology *Dark Horse Presents*. Charles says he was inspired to create this series "Because I've listened to the songs for over twenty years now. They are great stories, filled with exactly what I want to draw. I love their language; the challenge for me is to find ways of learning to *draw* that gorgeous language." Forthcoming are tales from Sharyn McCrumb (*Thomas the Rhymer*), Elaine Lee (*Tam Lin*), Midori Snyder (*Barbara Allen*), Delia Sherman (*Daemon Lover*), Ellen Kushner, Emma Bull, Neil Gaimon and others.

We must not ignore the Celtic music tradition itself. There is a staggering wealth of tapes, CDs, and concerts to choose from, even if one is not lucky enough to have a folk club or good British pub down the road. In addition to the bands and singers listed above, Loreena McKennitt, Connie Dover, Sheila Chandra, John Renbourn, Silly Sisters (June Tabor and Maddy Prior), Capercaille, Kornog, Beating Harps, and a host of others can be found in the folk or world music sections of most well-stocked music stores.

Like all folk material, the written word and visual arts can only complement, not replace, the oral experience. To hear these old songs in a live performance by these gifted modern musicians gives us a taste of what it must have been like Once Upon a Time, when the traveling minstrels came to play. They would take out their fiddle, their harp or their drum, or else simply raise their voice in song—a song of joy, then a song of pain. And then, at last, "The Faery Reel." ♪

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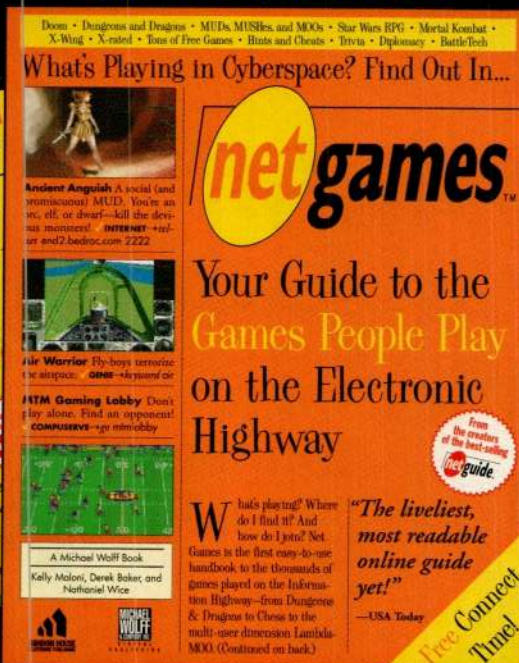
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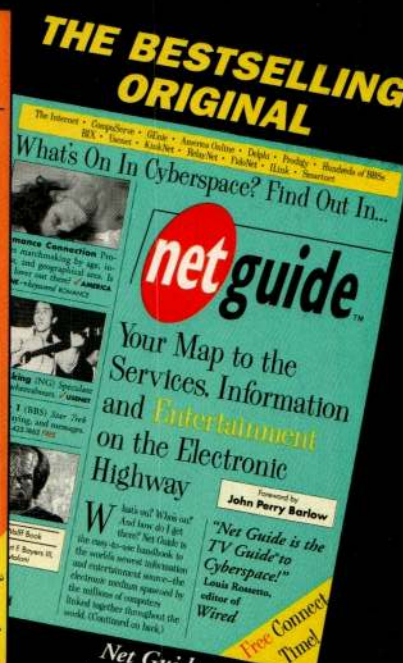
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THE RUSTY SMITH AND FAER LINDEN

BY NANCY VARIAN BERBERICK

Illustration by Mary O'Keefe Young

SHE WAS A DREAM OF SILVER MOONLIGHT, a splendor of long legs and arms graceful as wings. Her breasts were white starshine. Her hair fell in long spills past her knees, a river the rosy color of the best gold. She was a pool in the haunted midnight, a place to cast reflections of perfect love. Her name was Linden, and she was Fey.

Will the Smith first dreamed of Linden when he was a babe, just a red-haired, freckly imp a-sucking. And so his dreams of her were all tangled with milky dreams of his mother and the sigh of the autumn wind in the eaves of the cottage. Every night Linden would dance on Crowned Hill, weaving in and out of Will's dreaming, a faer born of the rock pool in the oak grove

*When a heart is caught by
Faerie fate, none but the
Faer can set it free.*

on the top of the hill, a girl made of mist and glinting water, forever near-grown.

In dream, on the hill, Linden sang as she danced to waken the blue-black butterflies from their tiny sleep to come caress her and be her gown. She sang just as though she didn't know that her careful illusion of artlessness was only more art.

"Oh, the King of Faerie does love me," she'd sing—soft so that Will's dreams heard no more than a whisper behind the wind in the grass.

Of course the King of Faerie didn't love Linden. The Horned Lord loved no one, for all that he played at it. He had no soul. Nor had Linden or any other of the Deathless. They'd traded their souls away long ago, before even the first of Men started wondering if the gods had names. True it is that a soul could be bought back, for a fee paid in bloodied iron, but it almost never happened that any of the Wild People wanted back what they'd traded away.

Now it is also true that Will, a-dream, wasn't the only one to hear faer Linden singing. Another heard, always secretly listening, and she was Rowan, the Fey Queen. Golden Rowan, like summer come, her hair

all red-glinting chestnut, ripe as ready harvest—or storm-clouds on the horizon, sudden and perilous. Rowan was a dabbler in fate, a seeker of knowledge. All her life she'd heard the destinies of mortals and faeries on the wind.

For all that, the Horned Lord's consort, the fairest of the faer folk, had only scant knowledge of her own fate, a ragged whisper of rumor: *One day will come a faerie girl to take the place of the Rowan.* Rowan knew no more than that, and this little she did know made her feel like a blind hawk riding a wild wind, deeply afraid that Linden was the faerie girl who would one day openly replace her at the Horned Lord's side.

"The King of Faerie does love me ..."

Rowan laughed to hear that—and down in the lee of Crowned Hill, people heard thunder and searched the sky for signs of the storm. That one, that king with his faithless ways, knew desire, the fire in the loins, but the Fey King understood no more than that. It needed a soul to love. No faer had anything like a soul. Ah, but Will knew about love, the smith who dreamed of Linden. Love haunted him like a sweet sighing ghost. Rowan knew that too.

One hot noon golden Rowan asked the south wind about this freckly man's fate, and she heard an answer: *Faer Linden is his fate and he is hers, bound and bound, round and round.*

The Queen of the Never-Dying heard that news rejoicing, and she swore a gleeful oath that she would help Linden to her fate.

ON THE VERY EVE OF MID-summer, when the sky was low and purple, when fireflies flickered in the gloaming like old, old memories, Rowan of Faerie turned herself into a trout and drifted lazily in the river's shallows, watching the smith at his bathing.

Will was the bathingest mortal Rowan had ever seen. Most of his kind washed when the quarter-rents were due, got scrubbed and dressed in their paltry best to troop along the cliff-road to the tall stony castle where great high towers glared seaward. Few of them bothered with soap and water otherwise. But Will bathed each seven-day in the evening, be the season hot or be it cold.

Rowan, the silver-sided trout in his bath, didn't think red Will was much to look at. Though he'd passed his flushed youth some years ago, he appeared to be fine and strong where women like to find strength, but there his beauty ended. The smithy-brawn of him made him seem all gnarled; one of his legs was shorter than the other, causing him to limp. He had a twisted nose, and two fingers on his right hand had been broken and healed crookedly. He had a gap in his front teeth. Worst of all, there were all those freckles.

Will had a forge at the magic meeting of water and road, and he had a flat-bottomed skiff to ferry goods and people across the river. He was reckoned a prosperous man in his village. The women there clacked and clucked and said that any girl would do well to have the smith for a husband. Yet years passed and Will took none of the village daughters to wife, though he took no few of them to bed.

And Rowan knew something else about rusty Will: once a week he went to the grove on Crowned Hill—be the sky full of moonlight or cloudy, rain or snow, clear or no. The grove was the place of his dream, the place where Linden danced the night. The smith bathed to clean himself of the iron-stink so foul to the Ageless Kin.

Now the Swain Star rose over Crowned Hill, brightly beckoning, and Rowan, the trout in the stream, flicked her tail. For the fun, she darted between Will's legs, startling him. Then she shot upward, breaking the surface into spiraling silver rings. As the smith left the river, his freckly skin glowing red in the failing light, the trout van-

ished. A wide-winged goshawk, Rowan took to the sky.

Will saw her riding the darkening sky, sailing between the stars above Crowned Hill as he ferried himself across the river. When he set foot on the far bank, hawk-Rowan circled back, swooping low. She let a feather drop, a gold banded pinion.

"FOOL ... " THE OLD WOMEN MUTTERED, ACROSS THE WATER AND IN the village, sitting on benches before the cottage doors to catch the cooling breeze. They watched Will pluck the fallen feather, and they whispered about all the strangers and dangers to be found in the wild woods past Crowned Hill. "And him goin' there on the Midsummer Eve, no less. Fool ..."

WILL THE SMITH DIDN'T HEAR THE OLD MOTHERS, BUT HE KNEW THAT they were whispering; they always were. He didn't look back, and he tucked the goshawk's golden feather in his belt for good luck.

And he didn't much care that village folk were starting to wonder if he was crazy. He knew he was, quietly crazy with love and longing. He'd been born that way, for Mam was a witch-woman from away east beyond Crowned Hill where the villages sit right in the shadow of the Faer Forest. She'd been given in marriage to Will's father along with two good cows and a new hoe and spade.

"No sense worrying about madness, Red Will," Mam used to say, her own red hair falling like a shawl over breast and boy. Her hair smelled of wind and the year's passing. "You're fated to the quiet madness till y'find your woman o' faer and make her love you."

Will would suck contentedly, sleepy with the milk and the warmth as he dreamed of the faerie girl who bathed in the pool on Crowned Hill. His mother knew about those dreams. It was the way of women of her kin to know what their babes are dreaming.

"I'm not cursing you, my own dear boy," she would whisper tenderly. "I'm telling you what I know. If you were dark-headed like your father we'd not be talking like this. But you've my own red hair, and so the self-same fated blood as is in me. I'm telling you now: Don't tie yourself to some village maid—though the fairest of them comes pouting and preening and sighing after you."

"There's more and different for you, Red Will, if you've wit and soul to catch it. Find the faer you're dreaming of, my Will, else you'll die of a starved heart."

Mam had done that, died of a starved heart. She could do nothing else, for she was wedded and sworn on the Holy Mass and before the sacred altar of the Good Christ to a black-haired ironsmith. And Will's father wasn't a bad man, nor one to beat his wife or neglect her. But he wasn't Mam's dream, and so he wasn't sustenance. When Mam could bear the hunger no more, she banished her dream and died.

Will would not banish his dream. And he was not for dying, him only in his middle years. Each last-day of the week, since he became more man than boy, he'd walked up Crowned Hill, slipping quiet as shadows over the night. There, within the hill's oaken crown, faer Linden danced in all his dreams. One day he'd see her outside of dreaming. That day he'd find a way to make his faer know that they were matched. Or that day, failed and fated, Will would die as his mother had, dreamless and hollow.

In the sky, low-hung and nearly still, hawk-Rowan watched the smith walking. She wished him the best of all good luck, and her shadow went before him, a little eddying darkness.

TWO TALL OAK TREES GREW WIDE APART, THEIR BRANCHES HUNG with honeysuckle, a green-arched doorway into the grove on Crowned Hill. Past that sweet dark way lay a rock pool, deep and fed by unseen springs under the hill. From this pool faer Linden had sprung in ages long past; in this pool she lived, a water sprite, a changeable child of light moods and dark. She was a mistress of games and seemings, and here she crafted her strongest illusions. Sliding, sliding, hawk-Rowan circled the hill. On the water's dark face, on the calm black surface, a ripple stirred, and the Summer Queen's shadow glided, round and round, stirring and calling.

Linden! Linden!

Linden, ever-maiden, skilled at love games and never touched,

rose up from the water, drawn like steam from a cauldron. Called, she answered, but not with words. She broke the water with her arms raised high, thrusting against the night-dark. She arched her back, her neck, in the long-practiced manner that made starlight run and spin away down breast and belly and hip and leg. In splendid silence, Linden taunted her rival, flung herself wide to the night.

And the Queen of the Never-Dying cried out: *Where is he, Linden? Where is our dear Horned Lord tonight? Not with you, girl. Not with you!*

"Nor with you," Linden answered, laughing. But her laughter came only thinly, a seeming without substance. She turned away from the sky and stepped out of the water.

Lack was longing, and Linden wished that the Fey King would come to her here in her bower. She yearned to rise up from her pool and catch him peeping in at the door, a secret lover come a-spying. She yearned to wake and find him bent close over her—his eyes ablaze, himself a-leap so that none could wonder why he was named the White Stag of Faerie—and just ready to touch her in the softest place, the secret place of joining. She would gasp and startle. Blushing fiery, she'd cast about with feigned desperation for something to cover her nakedness. But there would be only a trailing honey-suckle vine, that not enough to hide a hardening, rosy nipple. He would hesitate, his breath warm on her, his lips so near she could feel the shadow of them moving across her skin. Then he would kiss her at last, softly. Hoping for a little sipping taste of love.

Here, on Crowned Hill, beside the pool and in it, Linden could conjure such a fantasy for the Dreamless King that he would count his journey into the exquisite shadows as near to dream, as near to love, as he had ever tasted. If only once Linden had the chance at him here, there would be a new Summer Queen.

But the White Stag never came to this place. It was as though he didn't know the pool, the grove, the oak-crowned hill itself, existed. That was Rowan's doing; a sulky, selfish hiding spell to bar the Wild King from where his lover was most powerful.

Linden leaned against an oak, breathing in the last of the sweet-scented twilight. She unbound her rosy-gold hair and lifted the heavy lengths of it to let the cooling breeze blow through. She thought, *Rowan has no more dignity than a scrambling, mortal hedge-witch.* And then she let these thoughts go, set them spinning away on night breeze, for here came that smith again, the crooked-nosed, gap-toothed man, limping up Crowned Hill to kneel outside her bower door.

Linden knew—faers know—that she was the moonlight in his dreams, the love-hope, the groaning sigh at the empty waking. All night he'd kneel here, outside the hill's oaken crown, longing for her, dreaming of her. And she, who could long, would never dream.

Linden sighed, then yawned. The smith was as boring as Rowan, and if he didn't reek of jealousy, he was certainly rank with the stench of foul iron. He *looked* like iron; him with his countless freckles like poisonous rust. And Linden smelled autumn on him, oak leaves bronzing, frost sketching doom at the edges of woodland pools.

The breeze turned and chilled. High above, hawk-Rowan's cry scraped the night, a screamed dare: *Find out what makes him dream of love, little Linden. Maybe you will teach yourself a new game to play with the king: the faerie and the mortal man.*

Linden turned her face to the sky, to the dark and the stars. Smiling prettily, she lifted her white arms above her head, a girl in the sweet promise of youth, a kiss away from full bloom, all dressed in starlight. She danced a small dance that took her past the oak-warded bower door. There she stopped, watching the smith come up the hill.

The faerie and the mortal man. How would that game play out? Could the Fey King feign a limp? Could he look so hopeful and haunted, so filled up and so empty?

She would say to the Leaping Stag: Oh, let me show you how the Fey play at love, rusty, rusty smith. You must touch me here; yes, just there. And I must kiss you so, and so, and then we will—ah!—but no, we'll not dare to do *that* for fear you'd burst aflame and die of it, not but flinders whirling up to the stars, a mortal un-souled and forever damned to the fires of want.

Linden danced again, twirling and shining in the moonlight, her

spilling rosy hair her only dress. And Will stopped where he was, head cocked, hoping and hungry. What had he heard? Linden's perfect lips moved in a chilly, empty imitation of a smile. He'd heard the wind from his dreams, and a hawk crying down the sky.

The White Stag of Faerie must not ever become bored, dear Linden. The goshawk drifted lower, her wings a shadow against the stars. Else he will find another to play his games and help him pretend that love is no more than joining bodies. And you, sweet Linden, will be like me. A hawk riding the nightwind, alone.

Linden stopped her spinning dance. Cold came a creeping thought: Was it Rowan's magic that kept the White Stag barred from here? Or did the King of Faerie begin to grow weary of her?

Learn a new love game, girl. His interest so easily wanes!

Linden stood very still. Oh, the last time the King of the Wild Folk had sighed had it not been for her but from ennui? Linden didn't know, and so she accepted Rowan's challenge. She supposed she could bear the iron-stench of the smith—even the reeking breath of autumn clinging to him—to learn a new way to imitate love.

Faer Linden spoke a magic word and made herself more than a whisper to hear. She made herself something to see.

SWEET JESU! SHE SMELLED LIKE HONEY-SUCKLE, like stars and wind and the grass on the hill. Will's tongue stuck fast to the roof of his mouth. His voice was only something to be wished for as she lifted her head, turned her starry eyes upon him.

High above the hill the goshawk cried, circling in the gleaming sky.

The faer, Will's dream, stood frozen-still.

Could it be that she paled? How can someone whose skin is the translucent hue of pearls seem to pale?

Will, tangled up in fear and trapped in silence, howled inside himself, silently shouted orders and pleas and demands that all came down to only a few words: *Say something! Keep her here!*

"Lady." He stopped, that one word heavy with a tenderness to startle even him, a tenderness like weeping. "Lady, don't be afraid."

The iron-stench of him turned her sick, but Linden mastered herself. She pursed her lips in a little pout. "Get gone, you coal-black smith."

Will's hope fell, broken-winged as she laughed scornfully. Fallen, hope came close to dying when he dropped his gaze and saw his hands, his fingers, the straight and the bent, their nails black-rimmed with forge soot no amount of washing could clean.

How ugly he must seem to her.

The faer smiled coldly. She touched a finger to her throat. As though it were a gesture of magic he could not refuse, Will looked up to watch her stroke the soft skin of her neck, trace a downward path. He saw himself kissing her in each place her finger touched: her throat as the pulse purred beneath his lips; the sweetly graceful curve of her collarbone; the breast, the white breast where delicate veins made a fine tracery like blue lace.

Dark on the ground, the goshawk's shadow ran round and round, like a wheel spinning.

Whispering, Will said, "Lady, I was born dreaming of you. We are matched, for you are the shape of my dreams and I am the voice of your heart."

The faer covered her breasts with her two hands, hid shining skin white as stars, nipples like rosebuds. Smiling, cold, she said, "Yours will never be my heart's voice."

Round and round the goshawk glided, dark against the stars, her shadow black on the hill. Will still had her feather in his belt, his little hopeful talisman. He took it in hand now, stroking the goshawk's pinion, and he loved it the way a drowning man loves a lifeline in

the icy sea. And, not drowned yet, hopeful still, he found boldness and spoke to his faer, his dream standing in the moonlight, white and naked and still glistening from her icy pool.

Gently, he said, "By this time tomorrow, lady, we will be man and wife joined. You will give me your heart."

The faer tossed her head, tumbled her rose-gold hair all around the whiteness of her. Her eyes were sharp with mockery, cutting. But the pulse in her throat, the blood beating, jerked a little and lost its light rhythm.

"Never that, you rusty old smith. You'll never have me. But I'll give you an oath so you won't go away empty-handed: By field and wood and the Fey King himself—I would not be an old blacksmith's wife for a full chest of gold."

She laughed, and he endured it. She spun a little, slowly on her heel, preening and cold and cruel. Will bore it, the laughter and the taunt. He bore it, and he held up his rough hand, the nails all broken and black-rimmed. Oath for oath, his voice sounding old and heavy and creaking under the weight of her disdain, he swore by the Holy Mass, by the altar where his own mother had been wed: He would cause the faer to be his wife, and he would cause her to love him.

The rosy-gold faer lifted her head, her eyes on him. They were strange eyes, hers: wild eyes, soulless eyes, born in the twilight. No oath sworn by Mass or altar had any meaning to her. Then the hawk in the sky shrilled, like swirling laughter, and the faer's eyes lost all their luster, the pulse in her throat leaped.

Linden! Linden! Linden!

Will heard the name in the hawk's crying, and he shouted it himself—"Linden!"—knowing it for the name of his dream. The leaping pulse in Linden's throat stopped, as though her very heart were squeezed to stunned stillness. And Will's own heart moved, yearning, aching with pity for the dread she felt.

Round and round the goshawk wheeled, wind-lofted, weaving a moment so still—so bereft of sound and sight and scent—that Will believed himself dead. Then the hawk dropped from the sky like a golden star fallen. Shrieking, talons glinting like tiny spears, she flew at the faerie girl, flew at his dream, to rend and tear, to scar and maim.

Will cried: "Fly! Linden, fly!"

Fly Linden did; a gray dove winging out of her grove, away from her pool and into the deeps of Faer Forest.

The golden goshawk, the Fey Queen, shrieked: *Fly! Fly! Fly!*

And fly Will did. He became another dove, and the rusty smith and the faerie girl flew side by side.

A-wing, he pleaded: "Oh bide, lady! Bide!"

But Linden would not alight.

WILL WAS FATE CHASING mortality and dread. He was no gamesman playing at the love hunt. His need, his want, it was all real and sharp as gray iron. He never left off, never alighted until Linden, unable to go on, at last fell to earth, her heart racing.

He settled beside her and covered her with his wings. He pressed himself against her, breast to breast, his heart a drum matching rhythm with her own.

In the gentle language of doves, he whispered, "Bide with me, lady." And she, deep in herself, silently raged: The fool, the fool! He thinks tender words will hold me here. Aye, I'll bide—but only the moment to catch breath and find another shape!

She shivered under his wings while the night sang, noisy with cricket song and the whirr of insects, the sigh of the wind. Here—in this very place where the great boulders thrust up from the earth

to make a sheltered niche in the forest, where the mould and leaves made a whispering bed to lie upon—in this place Linden had last played at love with the Fey King. He had not been tender. He had played; but hard, cruel games. He'd said he craved tears, a lover's tears. She had feigned as best she could, given every illusion of perishing for want of him.

But she could not perish. No faer could until the world's ending. And she could not weep a lover's tears, for she could never truly love. Nor could he. It needed a soul for that. Tearless in the night, a failed illusion, Linden had looked off into the darkness. Through the hard web of the White Stag's horns she'd watched fireflies dancing.

Even as on that night, fireflies flickered in the darkness now. Beneath the wings of the dove hawk-Rowan had made to match her, Linden trembled. What was an illusion if no one came to see her? Not but empty mist and soon forgotten.

A little dove-Will moved his wings, settled back to let the faer breathe more easily.

Swift leaped a hare from beneath his wings. A flash of white tail, a hiss of bracken, and she was gone, crying:

"Now follow, weary dove! Now follow the hare if you can, you rusty old smith!"

It was no dove who followed, but a good gray hound who didn't worry about darkness. He had himself a fine nose. The wonderful scent of her, heady as the sacred red wine, lingered on every blade of grass, every stone and grain of earth she touched.

When the stars paled before dawn's first rosy waking, the hound caught the hare in his fanged jaws. Her scream, high and shrill and terrified, made the goshawk come wheeling low to see who'd captured prey.

THIS IS HARD, HOUND-WILL THOUGHT, AS HE SAT ALONE IN THE POPPY-field scratching fleas and watching the sun rise over all the spreading red. This is hard.

Ah, not the changing. By the grace of whatever magic had touched him on Crowned Hill, it took only a wink and a thought to do the shape-changing. And, Jesu Lord, that was wondrous to feel! The one form running off and out, and the other rising and filling all at the same time—and Will not knowing whether to collapse or burst.

No. What was hard was knowing what shape the changing must take. A hare bolted and he'd become a hound before he could think that catching the poor little beastie might be worse than not. The taste of hare in his mouth had set him to slavering. He shuddered now to recall how the man had almost been too late forbidding the hound his dinner.

And then the hare had screamed and Will dropped her, dreading that hers was a death cry. Freed, she was gone in a wink, and he was left scratching here in the wide red sweep of poppies, with no way to know where or how she'd gone.

High above the poppy field the goshawk screamed again. Another of her feathers drifted down in wheeling spirals on the still morning air to vanish amidst the opening flowers.

Ah.

Hound-Will winked and he changed—and the bumblebee remembered what the hound knew. The buzzing bee knew which flower to kiss, which poppy to taste.

IN THE GLARING BLUE SKY, THE QUEEN OF THE WILDINGS CRIED: *THIS is no game, Linden! No game! No game!*

All the night past had been made up of illusion and magic seemings, still it was no game. Linden knew it.

This is fate, said the hissing of the goshawk's wings.

Linden shivered in the shadow of the hawk, the poppy bent a little on her slender stem in the breeze of Rowan's passage.

The bee drifted nearer, wings singing in the warming air.

Came a light touch and Linden, the scarlet poppy wide-spread to the morning, bent as the bee—old yellow-banded black bee, old rusty stock of a blacksmith!—alighted upon a silky petal, nuzzling and nudging at the flower's dark and secret center. Came a kiss, a tender, sipping kiss; a taste of the heart, a long, sweet-aching draw-

ing out of nectar.

Give me this, he hummed, give me this; I will give you more if you only bide, lady. So I did suck, a babe at my mother's breast, to fill me; so I will at yours before I fill you. Oh bide, lady. Bide!

Lady...

But she was no woman, mortal or Fey. She was a flower opening beneath him. And the poppy felt that drawing-out, that tender, gentle suckling, and knew—as flowers know—that she was not empty. He took, but he left something behind, a dust of pollen. Gold, the bonny gold, the dusty-sweet promises of mating and matching.

"Lady," the bee said. "Look into me and see who our children are."

Linden looked—how could she not?—and she saw children who were blue of eye, bright of heart. One had a red, red thatch of hair. These children, seen in the depths of Will's eyes, found there like treasure at the bottom of a dark well, were dreams yet, but they could be more, would be more if the dreams were set to seed in the safe darkness of a woman's womb.

And Linden, she knew that she was not that woman with the safe dark womb; she could never change a dream into a child. She was faer, she was mist and illusion, game and plaything. In her, a new ache opened, like a whirlpool sucking everything into it until it collapses of its own emptiness.

"Linden," whispered the bee, whispered Will. "Listen to them, hear your children. Lady, we'll dream of them together, we'll make them strong and good. Red, they'll be, like my poppy faer ..."

In her, fear rose up, like a scream mounting, aching to be given voice. Whatever fulfillment they find in summer, flowers die with the autumn. So do mortals, for all that they love. So do the children they bear, for all that they dream.

Came the goshawk wheeling, the Summer Queen crying exultant laughter down the sky. Her shadow passed over the field, the poppy and the bee, cool and weaving, round and round.

Linden left the bee beating his wings, the buzzing a mournful song in the pollen-dusty air where once his poppy had been.

SHE TURNED HERSELF INTO A HARP, strung with silver and gold; he became the summer wind and teased a laughing song. And she became the lightning, wild across the sky. But he became the lightning's voice, the deep thunder of her heart. She became the driving rain, fighting and weeping, a-wail. Will was the earth she fell upon. He welcomed her and cozened her, and sprang alive to feel her touch.

At moon's rise she made her body an oaken chest, a trove washed up from the sea. Her heart she made a lock. Will became the golden key. Touching and seeking—and then the deep thrust—he was her match again. But the sea chest held no treasure of spice or gem or silk. It was as empty as the place where a faer's soul should be.

Within, like the ghost-voice of the sea in a shell, the voices of unmade children, undreamed dreams, rose and fell, hushing and sighing.

"I hate you," Linden hissed, her voice like the surf on the shore. "I hate you, you coal-black smith."

Though she yet remembered how he'd teased the laughing song from her; remembered how he'd become her own heart's deepest voice. She yet felt him welcome her when she was the rain. And she still felt the touch, the turn, the final, urgent thrust of the key going home into the lock.

Now here, by moonlight, at the ocean's side, Will reached for her. She didn't move but to flinch. He brushed a crooked finger against her throat as gently as the bee had caressed the poppy. And that—ah, that grand, that terrible gentleness—was what she hated most.

In all the endless days and nights of her Wilding life, Linden had never had more than an illusion of this tenderness to give, only its shadow to receive. This gentleness of Will's was like lightning a-throb in the night, was real and endless and made up of all the true feeling she'd only played at. It whispered awake an ache in her, never known—never felt!—until the rusty smith, this absurd, limping, mortal man, had touched her and touched her again. He'd made her sing, he'd made her laugh. Rusty Will had made her welcome, and he'd unlocked the empty place in her where a soul should be. Into it he'd put the echoes of children's voices, children undreamed yet, unborn. Into the empty place he'd put the promise that, with him, Linden would be more than illusion, more than unending dream.

If only she would consent to be what he begged her to be.

"We are matched, lady," he said now.

The sea came in. The sea went out. Gulls hung in the sky, the black and silver night.

"No," Linden said. But she said it wearily, her head tilted far back, watching the goshawk sailing out over the ocean to scatter the drifting gulls. Night and day and night again, the Wild Queen pursued her like unswerving doom.

Rowan wants me gone. She wants her White Stag back, and me far away where he cannot find me.

Came a foamy wave curling, kissing the shore. So secretly and subtly that she'd not recognized it till now, the rhythm of her heartbeat was changing to move in the beat and long pauses of the sea. She was faer, a child of water, a changeable, shifting illusion. Not much of substance in her, only the will and the power to change and change again.

Rowan wheeled low, drifting on the night breeze, sailing close to the earth and the shore. The golden hawk screamed:

Get gone from here!

Weary, Linden didn't even look up at the sky. There was no point to make anymore, and not enough strength for arguing. Rowan had won. Without looking at the smith, Linden rose and went to stand at the water's edge.

"Lady," Will whispered. "Linden."

She did not even turn.

"Stay with me, Linden. Dream with me, Linden. Faer, love me."

"No," she said, her eyes on the moon and the sea and the wind that only a faer can see.

No. She never would let this mortal man—dying since the day of his birth—make her want his love, make her need what he could not give her forever. She was Fey and he was not. What use to have his love for the fleeting moment of a mortal span and then have to mourn its loss forever?

"We are matched," he said simply, as though answering a question. "You are my fate; I am yours."

Then Linden did turn, turned to end this. She beckoned, and once she'd have laughed to see Will scramble to his feet and limp across the strand to stand beside her.

"No," she said, but she hadn't meant to speak so gently, or even known that she could. "No. We are not matched, rusty smith." She touched him, low, with a light pressure, a teasing touch to feel the rising strength of him.

"I can do that to you. But that's not love. That's just my hand on you. It needs a soul for love, and I have none unless I borrow one from flower or bird or beast or earth." She stroked him, only a little, and sadly. "You are the key to an empty chest."

But not quite empty. She knew it, though she didn't say it to him. Not quite empty anymore. Sighed in her now the echoes of what could be.

Will covered her hand and lifted it from him, held it in his own two as carefully as though it were a red silken poppy. Then he kissed her fingertips, each kiss a prayer, each finger an altar. He kissed her palm, her wrist where the pulse beat leaping.

But she freed her hand, for she smelled autumn again. Ending and sadness and parting.

"You dream of perfect love," she said. "I am only its reflection. Go dream of something else. Dream of the sea or the wind or ..."

Continued on page 75



A RUSH OF WINGS

We've paid for our progress in many coins. But surely we never meant to spend this one?

THE VERY FIRST NAKED WOMAN THAT I ever saw was lying on her back in the surf along a stretch of rocky beach where I used to run with my dog.

I remember that day well, a Sunday, the first day of spring: cold with bitter winds blowing stings of sand. I knew my face would be chapped by the time I returned home to leave for church. The hair on my capless head whipped with the wind. I hated hats.

It was early morning. I was chilled, colder than I'd probably been in all of my twelve years, but hot with anger at my father. Skipper was up among the dunes sniffing around for a good place to pee. Busy being mad, I walked stiffly in a buttoned-up coat and scarf, my feet dragging in the sand.

Between the wind and the sound of the pounding surf, I couldn't hear much of anything else. There was a storm coming, and I guess this is the way nature sometimes warns us. My startled words, like the muttered ones before, were whisked away unheard when I sighted the body and ran against the tug of the wind.

She was small and white, delicate arms waving in the cold swells. Clinging like seaweed, her hair hid the side of her face turned toward me. Her hips rose and fell with the motion of the water, which excited me even in her death. Then I saw the limp translucent wings that sprouted from her back when a larger wave drew, turned, and threw her farther up on the

BY RICHARD ROWAND
Illustration by Laurie Hardin

shore, rolling her over.

I wanted to run. I had seen a lot of objects washed up on the shore, and have seen a lot more since. I even had a collection of shells gathered mainly after storms like the one threatening, but this was the first body. Later in life I would find another, a dead soldier, many years in the future, when it was not so unusual to find the dead. That, though is a more recent memory of another time, almost another world.

I didn't run. More than the cold froze me. I glanced around and saw Skipper's tail disappear behind a mound of sand. The distant lighthouse was close enough for me to wonder if the keeper were awake, and if he could see me through his glass. The surf roared incessantly.

With the keeper in mind, I maneuvered around so that the lighthouse and the wind were at my back. She looked so pale and white in the gray of the clouded morning. The last wave had lifted and washed her far enough up so that her face and chest were on the packed sand, arms trailing behind her. Soft and oh so delicate wings wrapped around her shoulders and, farther back, floated in the swells.

For a moment I thought of the traveling circus and the sideshow with sword swallower and bearded lady, the midgets and the hairy man, the shelves of jars, torch-lit from behind, the two-headed calf, the five-legged puppy, and the one-eyed squirrel. Barkers sang their come-along songs, the crowds mumbled and laughed and jeered, and I stood fascinated, staring at the jars until my mother pulled me away.

But the beach held the real thing.

My tongue exploring the empty place where I had lost the last of my first teeth the day before, I squatted down, watching her. My face was set in a grim smile against the chilled and biting air; and every once in a while I opened my mouth a bit to feel the cold air against my gum, wondering what to do.

My father wouldn't believe me, I was sure. He would dismiss it as childish prattle. Of course, my mother would sound like she believed me, then ruin that hope by telling me to clean up and change for church. Who else could I tell? I was the oldest of the children around and had lately been feeling superior in my age.

As the water receded somewhat, I impulsively stepped closer and grabbed her wrist. It felt cold and strange, like a dead fish in winter. I immediately dropped it and stepped back, looking around again. The wind kept whipping my hair.

If I found someone to believe, what then? I knew it would make the papers. I fancied seeing my name in the headlines.

Bravely I reached for her wrist again when I felt something brush against the back of my leg...Skipper, and jumped, almost running into the water.

He dropped the stick from his mouth and edged toward the woman's head, sniffing, trying to catch a scent, his light brown fur matted and tangled with burs.

SHE LOOKED
So pale and
white in the
gray of the
clouded morning.
The last wave had
lifted and washed
her far enough up
so that her face
and chest were on
the packed sand,
arms trailing
behind her. Soft
and oh so delicate
wings wrapped
around her
shoulders...

Age, they say, brings wisdom. I'm not sure though that I am any wiser now than I was then. Maybe doubt is what wisdom really is. I've thought about that day many times over the years, wondering if I made the right choice, wondering if the arrogance of my youth kept the world from knowing something important. I don't know. I think I would make the same choice again.

Seeing her there was a lot different than seeing old Mr. Curtis in his coffin that autumn past, which had been my first viewing. Mother called it a layout, and that's what it was all right, with him laid out for all the village to take a last look.

Steeling myself and shutting my eyes, I grabbed her again and, straining, pulled her all of the way out of the water up to the crusty sand. She was about my size and very frail. Before turning her loose, I heaved her over onto her back. Her wings folded and bent beneath her.

Her wet hair still clung around her face, soft nose pointing up at the sky. Her skin was so smooth and white except for the wisps of dark hair between her legs. My eyes widened at seeing the rawness of her feet and legs where crabs had been feeding. Why, I thought, had they left her face alone? My stomach felt as though it were a twisting piece of wash.

Skipper kept sniffing around her, his tail tucked between his shivering back legs.

What to do? If I left her there, someone else would surely find her, crowds would gather, or, worse yet, they might steal her away to put in a large bottle to exhibit in some sideshow of a circus. I don't know. She seemed to deserve better than that.

My mother might agree. My father would tell me to leave well enough

alone, to leave it to others, to mind our own business. Grow up, he would say. Like the night before when he told me not to expect a coin beneath the pillow for my lost tooth. *Put away the childish beliefs and join the real world—the hard world.*

He was right. The tooth was still beneath my pillow when I awoke.

I had gone out that morning wanting to run and play with Skipper. Instead I had brooded while my dog ran on alone. I didn't particularly want to join the real world if there wasn't any fun, any magic. I wanted to believe the childhood myths and stay forever running on the beaches of innocence.

The year before, my father had been persuaded to go to London for the Great Exposition at the Crystal Palace. He came back telling us of the wonders he had seen, excited and depressed at the same time. I believe that some spirit deep inside him wanted to embrace the progress that the exhibition promised, but something else held stronger sway over his emotions.

His eyes almost glowed as he described the great clanking gear-driven machines that did the work of many men in a fraction of the

time. But the disdain in his voice dampened his own enthusiasm when he spoke of the machines taking the place of men, putting honest folk out of work, and giving us tracing-paper copies of commodities instead of goods imbued with their creators' spirits.

I was fascinated by his descriptions of the telegraph and thought how wonderful it would be to know what was going on in the rest of the world before it was old news and history. Events seemed now to plod while people caught up to them.

With a faraway look in her eyes and calloused fingers pushing a needle through one of my socks, my mother dreamed of the sewing machine that my father described.

I think that evening marked the first real fight between my father and me. He rambling on about the old ways being the best ways, annoyed at my interruptions for details of the new inventions, until he told me that progress was really nothing more than a day without pain or disappointment, that our lives were meant to be worked hard, and that being dead tired after a long day was preferable to being guilty of the sin of idleness.

I argued that all a long day brought was another long day, that idle time might give rise to other inventions to make work even easier.

Maybe he truly wanted me to see things his way, because instead of ending our disagreement right there as usual by sending me to bed or to the corner to stand in silence, he explained the satisfaction of seeing a job well done. He told me how good it felt to sit down to a meal knowing that the ache of his bones had provided that food.

I should have nodded and agreed instead of insisting that there were better ways, that I wasn't going to waste myself as he had. He gave up his patient explanation and told me that youth held too much hope. I answered that too much hope was better than giving up as he had. He tried to backhand me. I ducked and finally got sent to bed.

Still apprehensive that the lighthouse keeper might see me, I dragged the winged woman up the shore and behind a dune. She was heavier than I would have thought, and left a furrow in the sand as wide as the flair of her hips.

I remember the strangeness of sweating in the frigid air as I used both hands and a flat piece of driftwood to scrape and pull in the sand to dig a grave, which was the first, though not the last, I would dig.

The wind blew around me. Skipper left, darting at dry and tumbling seaweed, and returned to wonder, I'm sure, why we weren't heading for home.

The gloomy gray of the sky that morning gave a strange color to the sand. The individual grains seemed larger, as if each one were separate and distinct. I glanced occasionally at the naked body, very sad for her. It wasn't the same as seeing Mr. Curtis in his coffin. He had been old and sickly before I had been born and looked more natural dead than alive. In contrast, she looked like life had been stolen from her.

MY KNEES
sank in
the sand
when I knelt at
her side. I'm
ashamed to say
that I touched
fingertips to the
dark point of a
breast before I
rolled her into the
sandy grave. She
landed mostly on
her side, and
appeared more
asleep than dead
in that posture.

Everyone had said that Mr. Curtis had gone on to his reward. It hadn't seemed like much of a reward to me to be buried in the ground and let the bugs and worms have at you.

When I finished digging, I was maybe a little more than waist deep. I rested until the sweat started to cool and I began shivering.

My knees sank in the sand when I knelt at her side. I'm ashamed to say that I touched fingertips to the dark point of a breast before I rolled her into the sandy grave. She landed mostly on her side, and I wondered if I should turn her. I didn't since she appeared more asleep than dead in that posture.

Something in me wanted to have known her, to have met with magic face to face rather than burying her in the blowing sand. Perhaps my father was a little bit right: I couldn't stay young forever. All I could do was stare at her, trying to memorize the look of her.

I wished to wake this delicate woman. Instead I started pushing the sand down, slowly at first, jumping at a scuttling crab that tried for a last grab, wanting to be done with it, not watching her because I couldn't bear to see her fragile face covered...her fragile wings disappear.

I thought maybe I should say a prayer or quote some verses, but I had the feeling that she hadn't believed in such things, and I had my own doubts anyway.

So I stood there staring, wishing her well, and thanked her for whatever magic she might have made. I think it was then I started crying, feeling as though for some reason my father, too, lay with her and I had somehow buried them both.

The cold clawed at my collar and cuffs until I shivered so much I could cry no more. The wind paddled at my

back. The crash of waves thundering drowned all other sound. The sand, in thin blankets, blew across the beach.

My father took a switch to me when I got home for losing track of time and for my sullen attitude. I let him. It didn't matter. It almost seemed a fitting penance.

Peace with my father was many years in the future. I ended up burying him in a deeper grave, with a proper headstone. Life seems a thing full of graves: Sooner or later we bury everything of value, resurrecting only memories. Perhaps the memory of my father is more of a comfort now than his presence ever was. I don't know.

But that night, after I had buried the winged woman, a storm slammed across us and beat down, changing the beach enough that I could never find her makeshift grave. In a way I'm glad.

YEARS LATER, MARRIED, I WOKE UP ONE MORNING AFTER A STORM and saw my wife lying there next to me in almost the same posture in which I had buried the woman with wings. I cuddled her awake and we made love. I thought I heard the sound of the ocean as I tasted the salt of my tears. ♣

*What is a miracle but a sort of magic?
What is redemption but a sort of miracle?*

THE LAZARUS CHRONICLE

BY AMY WOLF

Illustration by Tom Simonton

MY NAME IS ROGER of York, and I am a murderer and a leper. As I lie here at St. Lazarus—to the north, outside Jerusalem—I can see the city in my mind. It sparkles.

My life comes to a close. In this Christian year 1199, I wish to record it, but I do not know how to write, and in any case have stumps for hands. Jabir, my learned friend, takes down my words without censure.

I tell my tale not to confess—for I regret nothing—but to show how a man lost to the world may reclaim it.

TO BEGIN, I WAS A MELANCHOLY child. My father, a large, forbidding man, favored me with the back of his

Translated from the Arabic by Philip D. Morgan, Cambridge, 1977.





hand or a stare. In truth, I preferred the slaps, because they told me I was alive.

Always, I strove for attention—at thirteen, I dyed my skin blue, in imitation of a savage Pict.

"Beast!" said my half brother William, the issue of Father's first wife.

"Spawn of the devil!" said sister Matilda, with the look of a petulant trout.

"Pagan!" cried Father Gregory, the parish priest who had tried—and failed—to teach me Latin. "You stand on the brink of Hell!"

These were encouraging words. But I didn't care. When Father dies, I'd tell myself, when his twenty stone lie moldering, I'll gain Mother's land in London and be lord over them all.

Such are the fantasies of youth. When Father *did* die—from feasting on eels, the glutton!—he left everything to William. And I, younger son that I was, had nothing; nothing, except vassalage to William, who had the power to make me knight. Ha! To me, that meant a slave with a title.

I did what I was told: trained as a squire at another lord's castle, held his bridle and polished his mail; but all the time, a great resentment tore through me.

I grew lawless. I pushed Matilda down rain-soaked steps and laughed as she scraped across stone; I struck William with his own poniard, leaving a gash on his cheek. My hound Wulfstan chased rabbits in the forest, so I could slit their throats and watch the blood slowly flow. In truth, I became what they called me: the devil's child.

In the Christian year 1174, at twenty, I—not exactly a Lancelot—was made knight.

"He is brutal," said William, touching steel to my shoulder, "but fighting men must be so. He will prove a great knight."

I tried. I fought in France with Henry against Richard, and with Richard against King Henry. I didn't give a damn for Plantagenet quarrels—I hoped they'd kill each other—but I did get to study Richard. He was slightly younger than I, a tall, well-built man with red-gold hair and eyes bluer than a Pict. Talk about a great warrior! I admired him, I think, as a bigger bastard on the field than I was off it.

My time on the field was wasted: I spent a year getting splattered with mud. At last, I rode back to York, to ask payment from William for fighting in his stead. He gave me a bridle for my horse.

MISER! AND A PIOUS ONE TOO. "TRUST in Our Lord Jesu Christ," he lisped, "and He will provide." God's legs, were silver pennies to rain down from Heaven? Rather than strangle him, I turned to other vices: running a high-wager dice game and getting drunk every night at the tavern. It was a pleasant idyll.

But brief. In the twentieth year of Henry's reign, I met up with my own St. Thomas. The next day I left England, never to return.

HERE IS HOW ROGER OF YORK, KNIGHT, GOT HIMSELF BANISHED.

I was walking by Micklegate Bar, seeking the Ouse Bridge. That I was completely off-course did not bother me. I swayed, cutting a fine figure of a man, I thought, in my high leather boots and fur-trimmed mantle. I normally rode, but my horse had misplaced himself outside the tavern.

I knew I'd get home eventually. Everyone else knew it too, for they gave me plenty of room. One man didn't, the pasty-faced fool: Father Gregory.

"Sinner!" he greeted me, his soutane fluttering like a standard. "Are you completely lost to the way of the Lord?"

"I am the devil's son," I told him. "Remember?"

"You are a disgrace to Christian knighthood! Look to your brother William, who honors the path of the Church."

"Your collection plate, you mean?"

"Demon! To profane the holy home of Christ on earth! To make a mockery of His grace—"

"Hear me, priest," I said, my brain still swirling with ale. I reached out unsteadily to touch a stone of St. Mary's. "I've no use for your Church, or your Christ. God hates me—and you know what?—I hate Him right back."

"You are not a demon," said Gregory, retreating, but his straight shoulders told me it was not in fear. "You are a heretic! Worse than the Cathars, for at least they believe in *something*! I will see you burned before York Minster—" He pointed a bony finger.

Damn. Why, after all these years, had I given myself away? I shook my head, clearing the ale from it like smoke from my imagined pyre. "Shhh!" I told the priest. Other villagers, tramping past, stared at us.

"I'll write to the Pope about you! I'll tell King Henry—"

I drew up to my full five feet. "Get out of my way."

He would not. I unsheathed my longsword and ran him through the heart, watching him fall to the dirt. He looked like a rabbit, white-faced, body red with slow-flowing blood. As I stepped past the corpse, I felt no regret. Nothing.

WILLIAM PACED OUR HALL THAT EVENING, WEAVING BETWEEN WOOD pillars. "Do you know what you have done? You have ruined the good name of Des Barres!" His weak frame sagged along with his belt.

"Good name, ha! Tell that to the peasants Father tortured." I gulped. The foul smells of cooking—and of sulfurous torches, burning overhead—did not go well with ale.

"Father was a great lord," said William, clasping his hands like a churchman.

"A great big one." I kicked the soiled rushes at my feet.

"They want to burn you, you know." William stopped before me, his voice cracking.

"I should think that would please you."

"It does! I can't tell you how much." William's cheek, still etched by steel, trembled. "But I must consider the family."

I thought of Matilda, long dead of ague. "You mean yourself, of course. What have you done?"

William moved down the smoky hall, his leather boots crunching into straw. He stood across from a hanging shield, its reflection blurring his face.

"You will journey to the East, into Palestine, to seek our Lord's tomb and there ask His forgiveness."

"Is that *all*?" I could barely believe my luck.

William turned his back to me. "I am willing to finance the journey."

I thrust one fist into the air. To be given free passage to Outremer, the land across the sea, where ordinary men had made extraordinary fortunes. I thought of freedom from William, of gold bezants to be had in the East. *The East*. That name alone conjured up comforts unknown to our gloomy island.

"No doubt you bribed the archbishop!" William's back remained stiff. "When do I leave?"

"Tomorrow. I hope never to see you again."

I bowed. "Goodbye, brother. I pray you get a nice slot in York Minster Crypt—at the foot of the saints, and not too drafty."

A TEDIOUS CEREMONY OF "TAKING THE CROSS," TWELVE DAYS OF easy travel, and I was in London. But what a surprise awaited me on her docks!

"Sir Roger. Sir Roger des Barres, brother of William?" An unsmiling apparition greeted me: a man with a filthy dark beard descending to his girdle, hair shorn as a monk's. His large white cloak, draped over mail, bore a blood-red cross on the left breast and shoulder. Scarred, sunburned features bespoke of a hard life in the East. What could such a fellow want with me?

"Sir Roger, I am Giles de Pratelles, of the *Pauperes commilitones Christi Templique Salomonis*."

"A Templar," I yawned. Latin had always put me to sleep. "Athelstan, mind you put that trunk on the ship!" I shouted to my squire, over the Templar's shoulder. "Idiot lad," I shrugged at Giles.

"God alone may judge a man," he said. "Lord William has sent

"It is time, Brother. To repent of your crime before the tomb, as did the slayers of blessed St. Thomas. Pray that God will forgive and guide you. I leave you to your penance." I was alone. Alone in a drafty chamber with a piece of pitted marble. I paced, drawing up my cloak. What was I supposed to do? Kneel before something I didn't believe in? Whimper to a God with whom I was at war?

me to conduct you to Jerusalem."

"Ah!" Now I understood. "You are to be my armed escort."

"Call me what you will, Sir Roger. Until we reach the tomb, I shall never leave your side."

The fellow was as good as his word. We set sail from London to Marseilles. In France, we boarded a war galley, fitted out with two hundred rowers. From one tall mast rose the standard of the Templars: a solid black square above a white one. The white, Giles told me, signaled peace to friends, but the black meant terror to enemies.

Didn't I know it! If I so much as looked at dice, there was Brother Giles. If a pilgrim maid, breast swollen with religion, wanted to share her ardor, there he was again. "Damn!" I said to Athelstan, as we watched the rowers strain. "Doesn't he ever sleep?"

"In his sheepskin drawers, so I hear, with the light burning bright! It's a Templar tradition."

"I thought they were all drunkards and sodomites! Why do we have to get the one who's honest?"

"All Templars are honest," said Giles, creeping up from who-knew-where. "We are warrior monks fighting for Christ."

"God's legs!"

"Don't blaspheme, Brother Roger."

For a journey of fifteen days and nights, I endured him. At last, Athelstan beckoned from the prow and pointed to a teeming port.

"Sir Roger, is that Jerusalem?"

Giles shook his head. "Jaffa. It is but a short ride to the holy city."

I whispered into Athelstan's ear. "Let's pray it stays in Christian hands long enough to make a profit." He shot me a pained look. "Get the trunks ready. Our Templar friend seems anxious."

One and a half days later, we arrived in Jerusalem. Other pilgrims fell to their knees and kissed the ground in ecstasy: I took a look around. Giles led us through David's Gate, down Covered Street and other thoroughfares whose pierced stone roofs sheltered bazaars. I had never seen such goods in my life—such silks and spices, perfumes and precious stones, glassware and delicate fabrics. It cheered me that a simple matter like holy war hadn't gotten in the way of trade.

And the people! They were what Giles called Armenians, Greeks, Syrians, even a Mussulman or two, all attired in flowing robes, chattering in Eastern tongues. Maybe the fools back home were right: Jerusalem *was* the center of the world.

"This way, this way!" Giles cried, striding with purpose down the Street of Bad Cookery. The scent of fresh meat being boiled and roasted filled the hot, dry air, and hunger seized me.

"How much?" I asked a brown-faced boy, who stuffed some meat with lard.

He held up a finger, and I tossed him an English penny.

"Merci, Monsieur," he said. "*Vous venez just d'arrivé, je vois.*"

I started, then spoke French. "What? Are you a Frank?"

"I am a *poulain*, Monsieur."

"A what?"

"I was born here. My father is a Frank and my mother is a Syrian." I let out a low whistle. What a place! It would be hard to tell the Christians from the Mussulmen. And both sides, naturally,

would have to watch out for me.

"Come, Sir Roger," Giles beckoned. "Our tour of the city is ended. Tonight, you will sleep at the Temple. Tomorrow, we visit the tomb."



GILES LOWERED HIS GAZE. "THERE IT IS. THE most holy place in the world."

"What?" I yawned. This irksome fanatic had awakened me at dawn, made me hear Mass, and dragged me through the streets to the northwest quarter of Jerusalem.

"The Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Containing the Chamber of the Finding of the Cross, the Mount of Calvary, and our Lord's tomb."

"How convenient." I looked at the sprawl of structures. "Rather recent, isn't it?"

"Oh, the Church was put up by Constantine, three hundred years after the Passion. She has been destroyed twice: by the Persians, and the mad caliph Al-Hakim. Neither could deny her life."

Gods legs! I thought. Is he going to have a vision?

"Come." I followed him across a courtyard, into a white marble chapel whose walls were covered with tiles. "Behold!" Giles nodded toward a bare hump of rock with a cross on it.

I looked at him.

"Calvary," he whispered. "Does the sight not move you, Brother?"

"More than I can say."

He dragged me into a high-domed room which housed a round, pointy-topped structure. Above it was a life-size statue, in silver, of the risen Christ. "The edicule leading to the tomb," Giles told me.

I bent to fit through the entrance, following a hushed band of pilgrims. They led me to a chamber the length of a man, where silver lamps hung low, lighting a slab of marble.

"The stone where He was laid and rose again!" Giles fell to his knees and muttered to himself in Latin. I stood over him, bored, then thought of something.

"This place was destroyed twice, you said. How could *this* be the tomb of Christ?"

The other pilgrims stared at me. Giles stayed where he was. "You speak true, Brother. The original rock was lost. But the rock by itself means nothing. It is the miracle of rebirth that endures."

"How true." I bowed my head. The other pilgrims departed.

"It is time, Brother. To repent of your crime before the tomb, as did the slayers of blessed St. Thomas. Pray that God will forgive and guide you. I leave you to your penance."

I was alone. Alone in a drafty chamber with a piece of pitted marble. I paced, drawing up my cloak. What was I supposed to do? Kneel before something I didn't believe in? Whimper to a God with whom I was at war?

"I repent nothing," I told the stone, "and you are an empty fakery."

I swept out, making the sign of the cross to Giles. I never saw him again.

FREED OF MY KEEPER, I PROSPERED. MY NEW PARTNER WAS A DAMA-

You are beyond us, said the doctors. Go home and exorcise your demons. Well. That didn't stop my forehead from knotting, or my body from running with lesions. God has done this, I said, as I wept on the carpet of my solarium. Please God, I prayed, if you will take away this scourge, I'll believe in You, I'll do Your bidding, I'll donate my fortune to the Templars!

scene who exported spices from Cathay. He supplied the goods, and I supplied the Latin trade. That he was the enemy did not disturb me.

I bought a rich house in the Patriarch's Quarter; Arabian mares, Arabian women. There was a tiresome law in the Kingdom of Jerusalem: Any Frank caught bedding an infidel risked his private parts. I kept mine by baptizing like the devil. Was anything beyond reach, in the East?

I became a near-Oriental. I wore silk robes, ate reclining on a cushion, learned to take baths and like them. For seven years and a half, life was good. Not perfect—King Guy was an idiot, and wanted my sword in his service—but on the whole, I had little to complain of.

Until it happened.

I was no leech, no expert in physic, so the pale patch which appeared on my arm, three and a half years after I visited the tomb, meant nothing. It did not irritate me, and I felt fine: fine, until four years later, when my ears began to thicken, my nose swelled and broadened, my limbs pained me and then went numb.

You are beyond us, said the doctors. Go home and exorcise your demons. Well. That didn't stop my forehead from knotting, or my body from running with lesions.

God has done this, I said, as I wept on the carpet of my solarium. Please God, I prayed, if you will take away this scourge, I'll believe in You, I'll do Your bidding, I'll donate my fortune to the Templars!

Nothing.

All right, then, do Your worst. *Bastard.*

I had to leave my pleasant house. A leper could not dwell inside the gates—not even a rich one.

"Master." Tears ran down Athelstan's face as he handed my trunks to a camel driver.

"Be silent, you mewling sheep." I turned from my house's facade, away from the splash of its tiered fountain.

"Sir Roger—" Athelstan extended a hand.

"Are you mad?" My voice pierced the air like a javelin. "Stay upwind of me, and never speak my name. From this moment on, I am dead."

SIR ROGER, WELCOME TO THE ORDER OF ST. Lazarus. I am Brother Celestine." The monk, hidden behind his cowl, bowed. "We are so pleased to have you at our hospital."
"I'm gratified." I watched as a Syrian boy carried my trunks from the chapel. White stone walls hemmed in the damp around a simple wooden altar.

"Let me acquaint you with the rule of our order. We say the Paternoster, Ave Maria, Credo in Deum, and Credo in Spiritum five times a day. You join us as a lay brother—"

"Ha!" The thought of myself as a monk was too much. "Listen, Brother, to *my* rules. I've bequeathed a hefty sum to this place, have I not?"

He nodded.

"Which means, if you want the gold to keep flowing, you'll bar me from your chapel and never say 'rule' again. Do I speak the

churchman's language?"

Celestine bowed. "Sir Roger, you misunderstand us. We are not here for profit. We seek to help those scourged by God—"

"What can you know of it? Easy to speak from a whole face!" I wanted to strike him.

The monk threw back his cowl. "Sir Roger, this face has not been whole for two and twenty years. It is the custom at St. Lazarus that the master too be a leper."

I stepped back, nearly upsetting the altar. Celestine's face was a mass of nodules, the right eye blocked by a hanging sore.

"My God!" I cried, "Is this my future?"

"Sir Roger, our Lord has given you a gift, to punish you for evil. If you have patience, you will be saved, as was Lazarus, who was taken into Paradise."

"Churchman's prattle—always spinning shit into silk! Nothing ever in *this* life; nothing ever *now*!"

"Patience, Sir Roger. You are tired. Rest now."

The Syrian boy glided back through the damp and led me to my room. Nice. A whitewashed cell with a basin, a narrow couch, a chair. I walked to the window and peered through its arch, to Jerusalem.

The center of the world.

LIFE AT ST. LAZARUS HAD A COMFORTING SAMENESS. I ATE IN MY room and avoided the others, most of whom made me look handsome. Within a half year, my left hand went numb, and my right turned into a claw. Good, I thought, let God unleash his mangonels. He will not break me.

One day in September 1187, I heard a banging from the city. Saladin had come. The others took refuge in the hospital, all but me and Celestine. I wanted to die, and he wanted his order to live. Two weeks later, he changed his mind.

"Sir Roger, we must depart! There are not fourteen knights left in the city!"

I laughed. "The great Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem."

"Saladin has been sent to punish us. Look what he did at Hattin!"

I nodded. King Guy—the idiot—had lost his army a month before. The Templars had lost their heads. I thought of Giles, now a skull-less pile of bones.

"We must leave, Sir Roger. We must go."

"Where?" The question struck me as humorous. Where was there to go for two men without faces?

"The patriarch will know. He is in the city."

I trailed after Celestine. At least Jerusalem would be interesting.

"We want ten bezants for each man, five for the women, and one for the children!" a Turk told a knight. I knew the knight as Balian of Ibelin, once a power in the kingdom. He looked completely broken.

Around him swarmed a sandstorm of Christians, many of them girls who'd shorn their hair. Ha! As if that would stop the Turks from raping them. I watched Franks with money go free, and the poor put in chains, to be sold as Mussulman slaves.

"Patriarch! Patriarch Heraclius!" Celestine yelled to a bearded old man who headed a train of mules. From their packs came the hard glint of silver. Someone had stripped the altars, and the Turks obviously knew it.

"Father!" cried Celestine, his voice powerful beneath his cowl. "Will you not part with your treasure, so the less fortunate may be ransomed?"

Heraclius thrust his beard at a Turk. The fellow hurled a sharp-toothed mace, splitting Celestine's skull. He fell at my feet almost soundlessly.

"God damn the Holy Church!" I screamed, shaking my crutch at the patriarch's back.

"Leper," said the Turk, in French, "I like your words. Stay and watch us wrench the cross from the Mosque of al Aqsa!"

"No." Not that I wouldn't have liked to, but I trusted this murderer less than the Church. I saluted Celestine and headed for David's Gate, careful to remain apart.

Egyptian mamelukes lined the streets, spears upraised in triumph. *Slaves without titles, like me.*

Once outside the gate, I turned to look back at Jerusalem. It seemed I had never been there.

THE NEXT THREE AND A HALF YEARS WERE NOT COMFORTING IN their sameness. I lived in a cave two days from Jerusalem, reckoning time by the flight of the sun. I had long ago lost a few fingers, but what of it? My hatred of God kept me strong.

At night, I scavenged dates and pomegranates. But April 1191, was dry and forced me onto the road to Jaffa.

On my way north, I learned something: The whole kingdom, it seemed, bowed before Saladin. Where can I go, I asked a Turk, to find some Christian town? Acre, he laughed, firing a dart at my feet. Go to Acre and spread more pestilence among them.

I LIMPED THROUGH A PALM GROVE, UNPREPARED FOR WHAT I SAW ON the plain before Acre. There were soldiers—tens of thousands—camped everywhere, their tent city bigger than most towns I knew. I saw English standards, French, German, others I didn't recognize. It was clear to me, as a knight, that the Franks were laying siege to Acre; also clear, from the watch on the hills behind the city, that the besiegers were being besieged.

My stomach rumbled. I would have to ask the Christians for food. I made my way toward the camp, passing a stream littered with corpses. This many men could not have died in battle. I thought I knew the cause: The stench of the dead was killing the living. I grinned. It was nice to know that other flesh could mortify.

"You, mesel, get away!" A countryman, his body wasted, tried to shoo me off like a tarantula.

"Alms for the poor?" My voice was more ragged than his.

The soldier laughed. "We can't even feed our own. Why waste flesh on a half-dead mesel?"

He had a point. "How did this happen?" I asked, gesturing over the plain.

"We're to retake the city. So says good King Guy."

"An apology for Hattin?"

"He can say I'm sorry till he croaks. All I know is that I'm starving. Starving and sick of fighting." He scratched his lice-ridden head. "This isn't how I pictured saving the Holy Land."

"Most things in life disappoint." My stomach rumbled again. "Englishman, I need food. I don't know why, but the body wants to live."

"Mesel, I wish I could help you. But I spent my last penny on a dead cat, and there's just a shred left."

I stepped forward. "Englishman, give me that shred or I will touch you, and you will die the death of Lazarus."

He trembled. We both knew that my very breath could infect him. "Here!" He threw me his pouch.

And that is how I survived, in the camp before Acre, for the next two months.

FROM WHAT I COULD GATHER, THE SOLDIERS AT ACRE, WHO KILLED their horses in order to eat them, waited for a miracle. At last, after laying waste to Messina and Cyprus, it arrived, in the form of Richard Plantagenet, King.

When he rode into camp, there was such celebrating—such a lighting of bonfires, singing of songs, blowing of trumpets, and banging of shields—that one might have thought God Himself had come to end the siege.

I didn't get to see my friend. He set up his tent and immediately fell ill. Poor King. I lived again in a cave, in the hills behind Acre: the Turks knew of my hiding place but were too afraid to approach. In some ways, my scourge was like a passport from Saladin.

ONE DAY IN LATE JUNE, AS I MADE MY TREK DOWN THE HILL, I suffered a mishap. The earth was littered with darts—the Turks had an endless supply—and one, with my luck, must have been pointing upward.

I limped along, unaware, until I looked down and saw a trail of blood.

"God's legs!" I yelled, falling into a sitting position. An arrow protruded from my calf, but I, in my wretched state, felt nothing.

"Bonjour!" I heard a voice behind me. It sounded like a boy. There followed a stream of gibberish, the scampering of feet, then silence. After some moments, a deeper, more mature voice sounded at my back.

"Allahu Akbar!"

"What?" I had never bothered with the Saracen tongue.

"God is great," said the voice again, in the lingua franca. A tall Mussulman strode before me, his black beard resting on a camel-hair robe. With his white turban, he almost seemed a prince.

"Excuse me," I said, "but if God is great, then why am I sitting here with an arrow through me?"

The man did not change expression. "Allah is great. You must speak for your own God."

I refused. "Do you have a sword, so you can finish me off?" I peered at him through my cowl, but saw no sign of a weapon.

"You will come with me," he said, unwrapping his turban and using the cloth as a bandage. He picked me up and placed me crossways on a camel.

I didn't have a choice. I went.

MY NEW COMPANION WAS A BRAVE man. So brave he transported a leper—and an infidel, at that—into the Mussulman camp. I chuckled as a huge tent rocked up and down before me. Probably Saladin's. I doubted he'd extend an invitation.

My eyes blurred. I must have lost a great deal of blood. "Let me die!" I shouted to the Arab. His princely air told me what he was.

He lifted me into a tent; placed me on a spread of pillows. "No. I have sworn by Hippocrates."

I didn't care if he'd sworn by the devil. "I suppose you're going to exorcise my demons?"

"I am not a Frankish leech," said the Arab. "I am Jabir ibn-Kaladah. I have skill."

He busied himself at a table, pouring powders from small glass vials into a chalice of silver. He spoke strange words: "*Ar-Razi, Kitab al-Asrar; Lemegeton Vel Clavicula Salomonis; Hermes Trismegistos.*" I tried to hear more, but my strength was ebbing.

I fell back against the pillows. It seemed a good time to die. I had been stricken for so many years; surely I must die sometime?

The weight of my body left me. I drifted on a bed of pillows. My vision grew crisper, clearer, like a summer's day at sea. On the horizon I saw a man, bending to enter a crypt. He was young and strong; he laughed, he mocked, and a slab of marble laughed back. Then the slab became a silver Christ, and though He was risen, He would not raise me.

"Bastard!" I yelled, my flesh regaining its weight. I spat as something was shoved down my throat. "Bastard!" I opened my eyes and Jabir looked startled, withdrawing the silver chalice.

"My friend, I thought I had lost you."

"LIAR! You raised me from the dead!"

He mumbled into his beard. "Barbarian."

"It is you who are the barbarian! What black arts have you used?"

"Medicine," he said calmly.

I shot to my feet like an unloosed stone, then realized my leg was unbandaged. All traces of the dart were gone, and my wound was perfectly closed. For the first time in ten years, I felt life in my legs and feet!

"What have you done?" I asked Jabir, taking a tentative step.

"I have mixed a drug," he said, "with the help of Hermes Trismegistos."

"Who?"

"The Greek. Surely you know Aristotle? Plato?"

"I know you are a great magician."

"Let us say a good physician. But not good enough to relieve you for more than one day." He sighed. "One can't be expert at everything."

I could hardly blame him for that. I was too moved by the feel of carpet on my feet. Maybe death looked better from a distance.

"MAGICIAN, WHY DID YOU SAVE ME?"

"All things are predestined."

"Is that what you people believe?" I sat back among the pillows.

"You were an opportunity."

"For what?"

"The poor man is an opportunity to be blessed in the eyes of God."

I thought of the silver Christ. "You're wasting your time. God hates me."

"I know. He is punishing you." We looked at each other. His gaze seemed to penetrate my cowl. "Sleep now."

I did.

I AWOKE TO FIND MY HOST CROSS-LEGGED ON THE FLOOR, PORING over a book.

"What is that?" I asked, stretching. My limbs were again insensible, but at least I was alive.

"The *Qanun fi't-Tibb* of Ibn-Sina. If the Franks knew of his physic, they would not be dying like flies."

"No doubt." It was of no consequence to me.

"*Tabib Ibn-Kaladah!*" A small boy ran into the tent, saw me, and grinned. I took him for my rescuer of the day before. He and Jabir jabbered away. When he left, Jabir looked pensive, resting his hand on the silver chalice.

"All is not well?" I asked.

"Malik Ric, your king, is very ill. He may not live through the night."

"Isn't that good for your side?"

"If he dies, the Franks cannot win. Therefore, the war will continue." He looked at me through sharp black eyes. "My family is inside Acre. I have not seen them in two years, since I left to care for the sick."

"Ah." So he missed his family. To me, this was a strange sentiment.

"Malik Ric is a great prince. He will show mercy to the conquered."

"To the conquered, perhaps. To the infidel, never."

"We shall see. With Ibn-Sina to help me, I can heal the king. But how am I to approach him?"

"Change yourself into a dove, or a Templar, or the Pope."

"My Frankish friend jests. I have only the power to heal."

I laughed through ruined lips. "You'll be dead before you reach the palms."

"Yet the leper is known to the camp."

"Oh yes. I rank alongside pestilence and death."

Jabir did not smile. "My friend—"

Something inside me twinged. "When I had a name, it was Roger of York, Knight."

"Sir Roger, you are a clever man. I sense you can solve this riddle."

I grabbed my crutch. "Without Hermes-whatever?"

"The Thrice-Great." He bowed.

ALL THE WAY DOWN THE HILL THAT MORNING, I ASKED MYSELF: Why? Why am I doing this? The answer came in a whisper: Because he aided you. Incredible! Never, in all my days, had I done something for another.

I didn't like it.

"You there!" After wandering the camp, I found my mark. I shouted to him across a ditch before the Accursed Tower of Acre.

"Mesel! Have you come to die before your time?" The Englishman, he of the dead cat, hoisted his shovel.

"Ahhhh!" A knight scaling the tower ignited—that is, the Turks poured Greek fire on his mail, which burned him to the bone.

"Nice!" I yelled.

"Lord, that's nothing—look out!"

We ducked as a marble column came flying over the wall. It shattered, flattening a half-dozen men.

"Well done!" I cried.

"Are you still alive, mesel?" the Englishman asked, trudging away from the ditch. He leaned against his shovel, keeping a good five paces between us.

"Strangely enough," I said. "You're looking fit."

"We captured an Egyptian grain ship. We don't have to eat cats anymore."

"Lucky for the cats."

"Steady!" The Englishman left the ground as sappers mined a wall. Smoke from their hidden passage oozed up through holes in the earth.

"No doubt this is exciting," I said, "but I have business to conduct. Tell me, are you loyal to good King Richard?"

"Of course! He is the greatest warrior in Christendom."

"That's just the problem—he can't fight from his sickbed. And now, I hear he's dying."

"No." The man looked stunned.

"Countryman...what is your name?"

"Ranulf."

A good Saxon lad. "Ranulf, I have with me a potion, concocted by the world's greatest mage. Can you—would you—carry it to Richard?"

Ranulf's eyes narrowed. "What if it's a trick?"

"Try the potion on a prisoner with *arnaldia*. If he dies, you know me for a traitor. If he improves, then heal the king!"

"Done!" Ranulf was so excited, he almost leapt to shake my hand. "And mesel?"

"Yes?"

"LOOK OUT!"

A flaming tree trunk came over the wall.

The Turks have style, I thought, throwing Ranulf a wool-wrapped bottle. He caught it in his shovel. Behind us, the war continued.

TWO WEEKS LATER, IT WAS OVER. THE TURKS poured out of Acre, bodies strung like bows from famine. The Franks poured in, but I, of course, stayed outside the gates. Sometimes, Ranulf would find me and throw me a scrap or two. I was content.

Until August. I was sitting on a rock by the harbor, watching the sea which had brought me here. From inside Acre, bells tolled: The mosques had been turned back into churches. Oh happy day.

"Roger! Roger of York!" A familiar voice sounded at my side. I looked up. It was Jabir, his princely face lined with worry.

"What is it, Magician?"

"The barbarian, Malik Ric! He has taken three thousand prisoner. He is to put them to death, to spite Saladin!"

I nodded. Richard was feeling better.

Jabir hid his face as a war galley passed. "Some of my family is captive—two wives and fifteen children."

"You've been a busy man."

Jabir sat down next to me. "Roger, the scale between us is evenly weighted. At present, you owe me nothing."

I remembered the silver Christ, newly risen, marble-hearted. He would not revive me like Lazarus—He would cast me into fire! I thought of this terrible burning, a leprosy of the soul. Jabir with his magic had snatched me back. He was wrong. I still owed him. "Goodbye." Jabir made a move to depart.

"Salam alicum. Peace be with you."

"That's right." I moved away. I didn't like anyone so close.

"Roger, I have prayed to Allah, and He has shown me His wisdom. I have studied the position of the stars. If you help me, will not God smile on you? Will He not forgive you in the Second World?"

"No." I laughed bitterly. I had already been to that world. Jabir put his head in his hands. *My friend*, I thought I heard him say, *the poor man is an opportunity*.... I remembered the silver Christ, newly risen, marble-hearted. He would not revive me like Lazarus—He would cast me into fire! I thought of this terrible burning, a leprosy of the soul. Jabir with his magic had snatched me back. He was wrong. I still owed him.

"Goodbye." Jabir made a move to depart. *"Salam alicum. Peace be with you."*

"Wait!" I stood as fast as I could, slamming my crutch in the dirt.

Jabir smiled. "My friend, again, you must enter the world of men."

"Barbarians, did you say?"

He took my hand.

I PEERED FROM BEHIND A TENT ON THE PLAIN OF ACRE, feeling like a Mussulman spy. A long dark cloak concealed me; a new cedar crutch graced my arm. I am handsome as Richard, I thought, shrinking against a pole. From the city marched an army, leading an army: Frankish troops, driving their prisoners with whips and clubs.

"Get on, you dogs!" I heard a roar, followed by the sharp crack of leather. I winced, pricked by the memory of pain.

"One, two, lift your feet, pagan scum!" The Mussulmen—and they were mainly Turks—could barely walk, chained as they were by the ankles. The command did not strike me as fair.

I followed as best I could, taking to the palms as they took to the sand. At last, the whole sweating mess of horses and soldiers, of shackled men and sobbing women, came to a halt on a hill, called by the Arabs Ayyadieh.

"Get on, get on!" yelled a bored English knight, herding the prisoners into a circle. "Mind you spare the strong ones—they'll bring a good price in Damascus!" He reined his charger back. The English infantry gripped their spears; the knights juggled their steel.

"CHRIST, AND THE SEPULCHRE!" The battle cry went forward. Women screamed as axes split their skulls; men yelled, entrails torn out, in the search for swallowed bezants. If this was Christian charity, then I was a Mussulman.

I lifted myself on my crutch, looking for a tall, well-built man. I spotted him to my left, astride his favorite stallion Fauvel. He watched the carnage calmly. After seventeen years, he was still a bigger bastard than me.

"Richard Plantagenet!" I yelled, limping toward him. Some bowmen aimed for my head. Richard stopped them with a wave of his hand, breaking through their ranks to get to me.

"Who dares address us in such a manner?"

"I do." I threw back my cowl. Richard didn't flinch. "I am Lazarus, returned from the dead."

"Ha, ha!" Richard trotted Fauvel around me, his scarlet cap bright, his two-handed sword dangling to the ground.

"Mercy! Mercy!" a woman shrieked behind us, as a Templar chased her in grim-faced fury. Richard ignored the plea.

"Some call us barbarians," I said. I tried to block out the moans of the dying.

"Who dares?" Richard's blue eyes flashed. He seemed ready to strike.

"Those who know the wisdom of the Greeks. Those who gave me this." I reached beneath my cloak, pulling out a paper-wrapped object.

"It is a...book!" Richard's eyes widened. He thrust his short beard skyward and laughed.

"Not just any book, King. The one an Arab mage used to heal you."

"Yes, yes, what of it?" He reared Fauvel impatiently.

"Do you know the value of this book, to the English? Before the Moors can pick up their pens, we'll have all the answers. To heal our men on fields of war; to heal our people at home. We'll be leagues ahead of the others. Of Philip of France."

"Hmmm." Richard reined Fauvel to a halt. Mention of his rival made his eyes shine. "Magic has a cost, does it not?"

"I know you for an honorable man." If it suited his mood, it was true. "Stop this slaughter, and the book is yours. Continue, and you plunge England into darkness."

Richard gave me a terrible look. He wrenched his sword from its sheath, hefting it as no other man could. I closed my eyes, waiting for the blow. A rush of air coursed past me.

"PUT DOWN YOUR ARMS!" Richard's troops looked puzzled, then obeyed. The stillness of the air—without screams, blows, metal on flesh—struck me as unnatural.

"Leper, give me the book." I threw it into his gloved hand. He tore off the paper cover. "What do these letters say?"

"The *Qanun fi't-Tibb* of Ibn-Sina." He shook his head. "*The Canon of Medicine* of Avicenna. In five parts."

Richard nodded, cantering off, shouting to his men to release the prisoners. I turned to the hills above Acre. I knew a pair of sharp black eyes was watching.

THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY APPROACHES, AND I AM DYING. MY EYES are blind and my tongue will soon be stilled. But I die the Master of the Order of St. Lazarus.

I came back when Richard left Palestine in pursuit of his brother John. To honor what I did at Ayyadieh, Saladin rebuilt these white stone walls. We are open to all manner of lepers: Mussulmen, Christians, Jews. It's the only place in Jerusalem where everyone gets along.

England is a changed place. Richard brought in Moors from Toledo, and they've been translating night and day. There's a Plato Society in London, and they talk of Aristotle in York. Medical schools serve hospitals—real hospitals, where they treat people! With a little help from Ar-Rasi, even William turns lead into gold.

I can speak no more. Thank you, friend Jabir, for taking down my tale. I've had many adventures. I regret none of them. I am, I think, the only murderer and leper to bring the East to the West. Goodbye. If God now wishes to forgive me, so be it. If not, I'm off to my other father.

Finis this day 23 December 1199, AH 576.

Salam alicum. ❧



"The evil that men do lives after them..." and before them. It echoes down through all the corridors of time.

BEYOND MÜNCHEN TOWN

BY PAULA MAY
Illustration by David Beck

WE CAME DOWN OUT OF THE MOUNTAINS in Bavaria, the gypsies and I, heading north along the shore of the Ammer See. We swung to the west of München town, with its great gates, mighty walls and easy pickings, warned off by the tribal markings of a band of Sinti gypsies, Sinti Rom in their own speech. And somewhere there, in the countryside beyond München, we happened one afternoon upon a lovely meadow, well-watered, fertile, teeming with wildlife, but without people. Numerous ruins testified to a once-sizable population, but the

buildings appeared to be long-abandoned, though they seemed largely undisturbed.

Despite its beauty, there was something disquieting about the place. The farther we moved through the ruins, the more uneasy I became, so that when at twilight we came to a massive jumble that could only have been a castle, I was bristling like a mastiff, my hair standing straight out from my head. I wanted nothing more than to be away from the place as quickly as possible.

I was therefore distressed when the band began to encamp in the broad field below the ruined castle. I went immediately to the *urdon* of the *capo*, whom I shall call Phillip from the Greek *Philippos*, meaning fond of horses, after his Rommish love of horses. He would not come out at once, demonstrating his authority by keeping me waiting.

I had been traveling with Phillip's band for most of that summer. They were Manush gypsies, whose travels traditionally carried them between the Pyrenees and the Alps. Life in France had become somewhat hazardous for all of us. When I first encountered the Rom in the foothills of the Jura, they were about half a day ahead of the soldiers of the Duke of Burgundy. Since I was myself running from a charge of sorcery and its attendant ills—trial by torture and death by fire—I was glad of the chance of traveling companions, even gypsies.

I am not a sorcerer, understand. I have studied the alchemical arts, quite diligently in fact, and after the fashion of magicians, took the name of that earlier adept Paracelsus as my thaumaturgic *nom de guerre*, but I was no necromancer. Truth be told, I simply haven't the Gift. No amount of studying can make up for that. I dabbled, yes, but with no success whatsoever. I made my living smithing fine metals, gold when I could afford it, mostly silver and copper. Unfortunately, when religious zeal is used to conceal base vindictiveness, innocence and guilt have no impact on the proceedings. False charges or no, I ran.

The Rom saw kinship in our common outlaw status and gave me leave to travel east with them through the Swiss cantons, outsider though I be. For my part, I promised to abide by Rom custom and submit myself to the rule of their *capo*. Phillip never missed a chance to put me in my place.

As patiently as I was able, I leaned against the *urdon* to wait. By the time the *capo* deigned to come out, one of his sons already had the campfire burning merrily. Nevertheless, I urged Phillip to reconsider the campsite, first in my halting Rommish, then in French, in which Phillip was fluent.

Phillip leaned against the wagon, letting me talk a little, then gestured to me to walk with him to the newly laid fire. He squatted beside the roaring blaze and I was compelled to follow suit. When we were both settled on our haunches, he said, "This is good pasture. The horses need to rest after the mountains. I think nobody will bother us here. Why should we leave?"

I could not think what to say. "This place is strange."

Phillip nodded in the direction of the elderly woman leaning over the half-door at the rear of a nearby *urdon*. "The *phuri dai* says there is magic here."

The *phuri dai* is the senior woman of a gypsy band, head fortune-teller among other things, and versed in the primitive magic the Rom practice. This *phuri dai* knew her business well. The hair-raising power I felt all around was supernatural, the first such force I had ever felt in my life, my years of magical studies notwithstanding. This particular force did not feel benevolent.

"Magic can be dangerous."

Phillip shrugged. "Dangerous to you *gadje*, perhaps. The *phuri dai* says it is not Rom magic. Not dangerous for us. Tell me, Paracelsus, were you better as a magician or as a smith?"

"I studied magic harder, but I was better at smithing."

He smiled broadly. "I thought so. Our *phuri dai* is a very good *phuri dai*. We will stay here for a few days. You may leave if you like." He stood and walked away, the discussion at an end.

Of course I was not about to walk out into an accursed Bavarian valley, alone, in the dark. I stayed in the gypsy camp, but my sleep that night was fitful, my dreams strange and twisted.

The next day, the Rom began poking through the ruins. One set

of buildings bore signs of fire and yielded no spoils, but the rest had apparently simply been abandoned as they were, with all their furnishings intact. Though the furniture and cloth items were damaged beyond use, there were objects of metal and stone everywhere beneath the undergrowth. The gypsies quickly amassed great piles of pots and plate, sconces and statuary, cutlery, tools and edged weapons in the overgrown streets between the ruins.

Examining the spoils thus displayed aggravated my sense of unease, for the steel was little rusted, the patina on the silver and copper items was modest, and much of the metal appeared to be less than a century old. I began to fear that the buildings had not so much fallen down as been thrown down by some massive force.

My ruminations were interrupted by a voice calling my name. The caller proved to be the youngest of Phillip's children, whom I shall call Perdita, as her Rom name referred to the loss which Phillip suffered when his wife died birthing the girl. Perdita was old enough that the *capo* was keeping an eye out for a suitable husband for her, and comely enough if a trifle thin for true beauty. She rushed up to me, reached for my hand, remembered Rom propriety at the last moment, and turned the reach into an impatient gesture to follow her. She was dancing with excitement like a child.

Rom morality is both narrow and unforgiving. I did not dare to go anywhere alone with Perdita. I had difficulty finding an old woman willing to give over looting long enough to chaperone the *capo's* daughter. Finally I offered my best girdle to the *phuri dai*, she agreed to come, and we set off single-file through the ruins.

Perdita led us through the tumble-down outer curtain wall of the castle via the roofless ruin of the gatehouse, through a gap in the inner curtain wall to what must originally have been a very private garden. There, on a shady corner of the once-fine marble pavement, sat a large honey-colored frog.

For some reason, Perdita was delighted by this frog. I turned to the chaperone, but she seemed as mystified as I. I could not imagine that the child meant to eat the thing, as the Rom observe a strict ban on the eating of wild things of all sorts excepting hedgehogs, for some reason known only to themselves. Supposing she wished my assistance in catching the frog, I began to circle round, intending to back the creature up against the marble retaining wall along the rear of the pavement.

With great solemnity, the frog moved across the pavement to the base of the wall, where wind-borne soil formed a shallow layer of dust on the marble. The frog sat back on its haunches, grasped a fallen twig firmly between its front feet, and began scratching in the dust.

If I was astonished to see a frog behaving in such a fashion, I was even more astonished to see that the scratchings it made took on the appearance of letters. As the frog scuttled along the line of its message, the old woman and I exchanged cautious glances, she surreptitiously making the Rom sign against evil, I signing the cross behind my hand where Perdita could not see. Finally the frog had finished and sat back, folding its forelegs across its belly in a distressingly manlike gesture.

Either the frog spoke a barbaric dialect of Latin, or it was an exceedingly ill-educated frog, for the words were badly spelled and poorly scribed, but nevertheless, I could make out that the creature had scratched, "Maiden kiss frog prince please."

I was astounded. This could be nothing less than an enchantment of the highest order. Though alchemy was my main interest, most magical texts jumble magic of all sorts together, so I had perforce learned a bit of everything in the course of my studies.

I squatted there in the dust, the better to examine the ensorcelled prince. He made an unusually fleshy frog, round-bellied and thick of limb, with several chins. He had brilliant vermilion signature spots on either side of his shiny gold pate and more vermilion freckled down the folds of his throat. The frog bore my scrutiny with a certain dignified ennui, as though he were quite accustomed to people staring at him.

I became aware of Perdita's voice, gabbling away at me in Rom, demanding to know what the frog had written. I waved her to silence, with little effect. To stop her noise, I muttered in her own tongue that

the frog wished her to give it a kiss.

That stopped Perdita's noise, to be sure. I glanced up to see her frowning fiercely. She looked back and forth between me and the frog, then snorted with disgust.

"Why should I kiss a frog?"

I chuckled, rising to a standing position. "He hopes to be free." The only Rom word I knew for free also meant wild, and the deepening of Perdita's frown indicated that my Rom was unequal to the task of explanation.

I switched to French, hoping the child spoke it as well as her father did. "He hopes it will free him from his spell. The usual counterspell is the kiss of a virgin, whom the enspelled man must marry within a short space of time to entirely cancel the magic. I shouldn't recommend kissing him, though. Fellow says he's a prince, but you have no way of knowing for certain until he's changed back. And even if he is a prince, he's a *gadje* prince. Your father wouldn't approve and you would be an outcast for kissing a man before marriage."

I switched my attention to the old woman, whose professional interest was surely engaged by the technical details. "The way these changing spells work, the victim is changed into the beast he most resembles. Imagine what kind of man would be most like a frog."

I glanced over in time to see Perdita hunkered down beside the frog, pursed lips nearing his slimy, yellow head. I shouted something inarticulate, the old woman shrieked, and the frog jumped into Perdita's face, smacking loudly against her offered lips.

The *phuri dai* grabbed Perdita's arm and yanked her roughly to her feet, shrilling about immorality. She pulled the child a few paces away from the frog, then stood glaring at me, muttering something about the stupidity of males, *gadje* and Rom alike.

There was a faint rumble of distant thunder but nothing more, and I dared to hope that the counterspell hadn't worked. A few moments later, a second clap of thunder rolled over us, louder than the first. Then a third clap and a fourth, each louder than its predecessor, like the pealing of a huge, bass bell in the heavens.

There came a gentle rustling from the trees as a breeze blew up. The breeze strengthened rapidly to a wind, the branches whipping and snapping in its grasp. A black cloud rushed over the valley in the teeth of the magical gale, roiling furiously, flashing with internal discharges of lightning.

Heedless of the strictures of Rom propriety, I grabbed Perdita's arm and dragged her out of the garden. The *phuri dai* was already in full retreat. I got us through the inner wall and behind the cover of fallen masonry just in time.

As the cloud streamed overhead, bolts of lightning struck within the garden, knocking our legs out from under us. I crawled to the edge of the break in the wall and peered cautiously around the stone.

The marble pavement and wall were shattered and smoking from the strikes. The frog was lying on his side, a vibrant gold against the black of the blasted stones. The acrid tang of lightning filled the air. I thought, I hoped, the frog was dead.

But then he twitched, shuddered, went stiff, arched his back, began to flush crimson, then to glow, until he was too bright to look at. The glow expanded as a high, painful keening rose from the garden, and I finally had to close my eyes and stop up my ears.

Abruptly, the light went out and the keening ceased. I opened my eyes, blinked away the dazzle, and saw a naked man lying on the ground at the base of the broken wall. He sat up slowly. I thought to myself that he was not the sort of man one really wished to behold without the intervening grace of clothing.

THESE CAME A GENTLE rustling from the trees as a breeze blew up. The breeze strengthened rapidly to a wind, the branches whipping and snapping in its grasp. A black cloud rushed over the valley in the teeth of the magical gale, roiling furiously, flashing with internal discharges of lightning.

His flesh was an unhealthy, sallow shade, wrinkled and loose where it wasn't stretched over fat. His arms and legs were long and flabby, he had a drinker's belly, a narrow, concave chest, and no visible neck. His head was no better: Bald of pate, with a narrow fringe of bright red hair and a straggly red beard, tiny ears, slightly bulging eyes, very large nose, unpleasantly wide mouth above a weak chin, a veritable dewlap of excess flesh folding its way down to the sharp knobs of his collarbone.

Perdita swore a Rom oath. Clearly, this was not the sort of prince she had in mind. If, indeed, he were a prince.

The fellow climbed to his feet and looked none the better for it. Perdita muttered something about scraggy chicken necks and giblets which I was rather glad to be unable to follow. The man looked our way. He dipped his head, squinting as the myopic do, then lifted his doughy arm in an imperious beckoning gesture.

The feeling of power was still in the air, if anything, stronger than before. I stepped into the break in the wall, then hesitated. The fellow repeated the gesture impatiently. I walked slowly into the garden, watching out for something, I knew not what. I stopped several paces from the man.

He drew himself up, swung his bare heels together sharply and ducked his head in a perfunctory bow. In a particularly ugly dialect of German, he said, "Good day, Sir. Give me your cloak. It is rather drafty." His voice was hoarse and entirely without charm.

I made no move, so he held out a demanding hand. "Come, come, quickly now, do not keep your betters waiting. A shabby cloak is better than no cloak. Give it to me."

Definitely a prince.

I handed over my cloak, not out of respect for the prince, but because Perdita's poultry remark had reminded me that I would be wise to protect the *capo*'s daughter's reputation as best I could. Phillip was likely to be very displeased with me as it was.

The prince adjusted my cloak over his narrow shoulders, then cleared his throat. "Better. I am surprised to be standing here. I take it that, despite appearances, the girl is a princess. The spell did specify a princess."

I shrugged. "She is the daughter of the *capo* of a band of gypsies, so I suppose she is something like a princess among the Rom."

THE FACE SAID, 'YOU ARE
*more beast than man, Prince,
so beast you shall be, and all
your followers with you,
until the betrothal kiss and marriage bed
of a chaste princess make you a man again.'*
I fell asleep where I stood. When I awoke,
the manor house was burnt out, cold, there
was no one in sight, and I was a frog.

"A gypsy princess. What an amusing idea." His eyes were calculating and cold, making me want to watch my purse and my back at the same time. He glanced about, then looked around more slowly, frowning. "Who is Pope now?" he asked casually.

I told him, and he asked, "And before him?" and then, "And before him?" and then again, "And before him?" Finally he shook his head and strolled out of the ruined garden. I walked beside the prince. Perdita followed a few paces behind.

A ferret dashed out of the shadow of the curtain wall, to roll on the ground at the prince's feet. The prince bent down, reaching for the weasel's head. A bright spark flew from the prince's hand to the ferret, the animal cried out and curled into a ball, glowing, growing, and a few seconds later sitting up a small, skinny man, as naked as the prince had been.

"Helmut. Good to see you, my Lord Chamberlain."

"Thank you, Sir. You look wonderful. You haven't aged a day."

"Neither have you. Apparently magical creatures are ageless. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for my palace. Do go find yourself something to wear, then see if you can find any of the others. Touch them. Perhaps your touch can free them, too. It will go faster if we can both do it."

Helmut stood, covering his privates apologetically with one hand, bowed sharply and hurried away.

"Your entire court was enspelled with you, Sir?"

"I assume so. Didn't see anyone actually turn, though I've been aware that some of the animals were not quite right over the years. Wasn't sure who was turned into what, of course."

"May I ask how you came to be ensorcelled?"

The prince scowled. "Why should I tell you anything? I don't even know your name."

"Nor will you have my name, until I know what happened to you. There is said to be magical power in names, and since there has clearly been magic at work here, I would be fool indeed to go giving you my name. In any case, I do not believe you have told me your name either."

The prince smiled. "We are both cautious men, I think. Well, I see no harm in telling you what you've rescued me from. It was that accursed Levantine sorcerer. Seemed a decent sort when he first

arrived. Called himself a physician. Asked my leave to set up a potion shop in the town, bought himself a fine half-timbered manor house from the merchant's widow, hired servants, and moved in with his daughter.

"I let him get settled in, then asked him to bring his daughter to dinner at the palace. I had a very nice banquet prepared, they ate their fill at my table, and all I asked in return was that the fellow turn a few hundred-weight of lead into gold. I'd had lead pigs cast especially for the occasion.

"Well, the damned sorcerer said he didn't know how to do it. Can you imagine? What kind of fool did he take me for? I locked him and his daughter in the tower for a few days, but he still refused to make my gold. So I took the daughter away as a hostage."

A little red squirrel darted in front of us, pausing to tremble before the prince. He touched it, the magic arcing between them, and it became a chubby, nervous, ruddy-skinned woman.

"For pity's sake, get some clothes on, Anna. Now, where was I?"

"The sorcerer's daughter. As a hostage."

"Ah, yes. Well, I really did mean to keep her as a hostage at first, but she was a pretty little thing in that dark way the Semites sometimes are, just coming into womanhood, you know. Too good an opportunity to miss.

I didn't think her father would find out until it was too late, and in any case I had concluded that he wasn't really much of a magician, that I was unlikely to get any gold out of him, and that he posed no threat to me. The girl was interesting enough. I kept her for a day or two."

I glanced back at Perdita, wondering if she could understand the prince's German. I hoped not.

The prince continued. "The magician said he needed some things from his house to work the gold spell. I made him swear that he would turn my lead into gold and held his daughter against his return. I sent him home under guard, the guards instructed to enter the building with him, but there was apparently some sort of spell around his house, because the guards all fell asleep as the manor gates opened. In fact, the troops I sent to rescue the first company of guards fell asleep themselves. We determined the range of the spell by trial and error, sending men in one at a time, noting where they fell. I set up a guarded perimeter just beyond the edge of the enspelled area and waited.

"I couldn't get at the magician, but I did have his daughter. I thought he would come around eventually. So I waited. The next day, the clouds began to gather. Lightning smote the earth, causing earthquakes that damaged all the buildings hereabouts except the sorcerer's manor. I realized that he wasn't sitting idly by. So I had my soldiers slit the daughter's throat within sight of the manor house, and brought archers with fire arrows to the perimeter to light the magician's funeral pyre from beyond the range of his sleeping spell.

"I went along to watch. The girl died stoically. The manor caught easily. The flames were so hot the whitewash blackened on buildings in the next street. The sorcerer's servants screamed when the fire ate them. One man, or a woman perhaps, it was impossible to tell, ran out of the gate, ablaze from toe to crown, then fell, apparently taken by the sleeping spell, and burnt to a cinder before our eyes. Quite exciting, that. As the roofs began to collapse, the sorcerer's face appeared in the pillars of smoke above the house. Huge, it was, and wild-eyed.

"The face said, 'You are more beast than man, Prince, so beast you shall be, and all your followers with you, until the betrothal kiss and marriage bed of a chaste princess make you a man again.'

"I fell asleep where I stood. When I awoke, the manor house was burnt out, cold, there was no one in sight, and I was a frog. My mem-

ory is somewhat fragmentary after that, mostly sun and green and wet. Froggish memories. But there was also an ache, great sadness. The kernel of manhood within the frog, I suppose, seeking release. Very few humans passed this way. Avoiding the place out of fear, perhaps. Until now."

We had come down into the ruins below the castle. At the sight of the scavenging gypsies, the prince muttered something I could not quite catch. I felt a sudden prickling at the back of my neck and turned around to see a pair of small red eyes peering at us from the remains of a large building. Then another pair, and another, hundreds of pairs of hot little eyes.

"Excuse me, Sir, but I think those creatures are looking for you." I certainly hoped those wicked eyes weren't looking for me.

The prince turned to look where I indicated. "Ah, yes, that used to be the barracks. Guard!"

A very large rat stepped out of the shadows and scurried to the prince's feet. Magic sparked from the prince's hand and the rat became a large, muscular man with a neatly trimmed full beard and small, feral eyes.

"Good day, Captain. Go awaken your men. A touch should do it. We have some housecleaning to do." The prince stared steadily and the captain nodded, something unspoken passing between them.

I glanced at all those eyes in the ruins, then looked down the street where several nude people had appeared among the startled Rom. "Just how many people were enspelled with you, Sir?"

"I'm not certain. I don't know if everyone was changed. But I had over five hundred soldiers here and hundreds of retainers and officials, so there could be quite a few of us. Quite a few."

Young men were crowding out of the barracks, moving off in both directions down the street, threading their way among the gypsies.

"Where are they going? What do they mean to do?" I asked, my tone far more shrill than I intended.

The prince grimaced an unpleasant, small smile. "I should imagine they feel somewhat out of uniform."

"Paracelsus!" Phillip moved toward me between the gypsies, the *phuri dai* at his shoulder. "What is happening?"

I swept my arms up and out, to indicate everything around us. "*Gadje* magic."

"Who is that with you?" Phillip stood in front of me, hands on hips, face tight with anger.

"The prince who reigns, or once reigned, here."

Soldiers continued to pour out of the ruined barracks. Chamberlain Ferret came sidling up to stand beside the prince.

Phillip said, "The *phuri dai* was moaning about Perdita kissing him. What him? This man?"

"Well, yes and no. Perdita did not kiss a man, she kissed a frog. Which happened to be this man."

"What?" Phillip looked ready to tear me apart with his bare hands.

I opened my mouth to speak, but turned around at a loud cry from the street behind me. One of the prince's soldiers was squatting beside a pile of scavenged goods, rifling through the finds, and a shouting gypsy youth was trying to push him away. The soldier held the lad off easily with one hand while he continued to sift with the other. With deliberate slowness, he drew a short sword from the pile and drove it up into the gypsy's abdomen.

The tableau froze, silence rolled away from the violence like a shock wave, bringing everyone to a halt. Then the boy staggered backward, pulling the sword from the soldier's hand. Into the silence, the prince roared, "Kill them all!"

The soldiers sprang to the salvage piles and came up swinging weapons. The Rom responded and the ruins became one big melee.

I could not take my eyes from the Rom boy who was first attacked. He still stood with the sword sticking out of his belly. The soldier rose to his feet, grasped the hilt of the sword and yanked it down and out. The boy fell to his knees, blood gushing from the wound.

Where his blood touched the earth, the soil began to swirl, boiling up in a great white cloud. The cloud exploded, a frigid cyclone blowing every man, woman and child off their feet. Indistinct shapes writhed through the icy air, momentarily congealing into taloned

claws, demonic faces with huge, flashing eyes, or gigantic, howling mouths with obsidian fangs, then whirling away again. Their fury was palpable, burning cold.

One of them rushed at the soldier who had attacked the boy and lifted him from the ground with irresistible, supernal hands. It pointed toward his throat with a third hand, slowly bringing the pointing finger closer until it lightly brushed the soldier's body. He screamed as his flesh peeled back before the terrible finger, and the demon slashed quickly downward, ripping the man from throat to groin. Soft organs burst from the wound like seeds from an over-ripe melon and began to smoke and sizzle, blackening in some invisible hellfire. The soldier went limp and the demon discarded him, looking about for another victim.

All up and down the street, bellowing demons swarmed over naked men, dismembering, beheading, disemboweling, searing. The metallic savor of roasting meat filled the air and I gagged, knowing it was human meat on the hellish spit. I crawled over to the Rom boy. He was still alive. I threw my arm over him, to keep him from the cold wrath of the demons. The *phuri dai* was shrieking somewhere nearby.

The prince scrambled over to me. "What is happening? What is that old woman saying?"

"She says magic. She says this is magic."

"Sire," called the chamberlain, "you must marry the girl. The rest of the spell, remember?"

I shouted, "No!" because the *phuri dai* was screaming that this was Rom magic.

"No indeed," bellowed the prince, misunderstanding me. "No Prince of the Blood would even consider sully his line with the impurity of a misbegotten subhuman like this. I'll slit her grimy throat myself, then I can't be expected to marry her." He thrashed against the whirling wind, getting his fingers to the bloody sword still clasped by the dead hand of the eviscerated soldier.

He twisted the sword free and swung it toward me. I thought he meant to kill me and raised my arm to ward off the blow. But the sword slashed past me and someone cried out from behind me.

Perdita scrambled away from me with a wound on her forearm. I lunged at the prince, grabbing his sword arm. Demons swirled all around us, crying for the prince's blood.

A great thunderclap rattled the air. The demonic howling died away. The lightning-laced black cloud boiled into being overhead and a deep voice intoned, "Betrothal kiss and marriage bed."

For a moment I thought I saw a mighty face in the cloud. Thunder roared as lightning lanced from the sky again and again, hundreds of bolts striking all around, deafening, dazzling me to blindness, stunning me to paralysis.

Gradually my senses began to unscramble themselves. First there was pain. Then hearing. The air throbbed with a low wailing. I opened my eyes to see a smoking, eviscerated, very dead rat a few inches from my face. I pushed myself away from it, up to a sitting position. Around me others were coming to, getting up, all of them Rom. The street was littered with dead or stunned animals. I looked at the Rom boy. His lifeless eyes were rolled up so that only the whites showed.

Other Rom lay motionless among the animals. A few were men, weapons still clutched in their dead hands, but most were women and children. Scores of them. The fight had lasted perhaps two minutes. The soldiers had used those minutes with vehemence, as if they intended to wipe the gypsy tribe from the face of the earth. Indeed, they might have done exactly that, had the demons not intervened.

The black cloud was gone but the demons remained in their thousands. The wailing was coming from them. They pulsed rhythmically, whirling distortions that sickened me to look upon. The stunned animals began to recover and crawled away into the ruins, the demons trailing, materializing into the odd weeping face or pair of wringing hands, but not interfering.

"What are they doing? Why don't they finish them?" I moaned, the words tearing through my raw throat.

"Because they cannot," gasped the *phuri dai*, crawling toward me.

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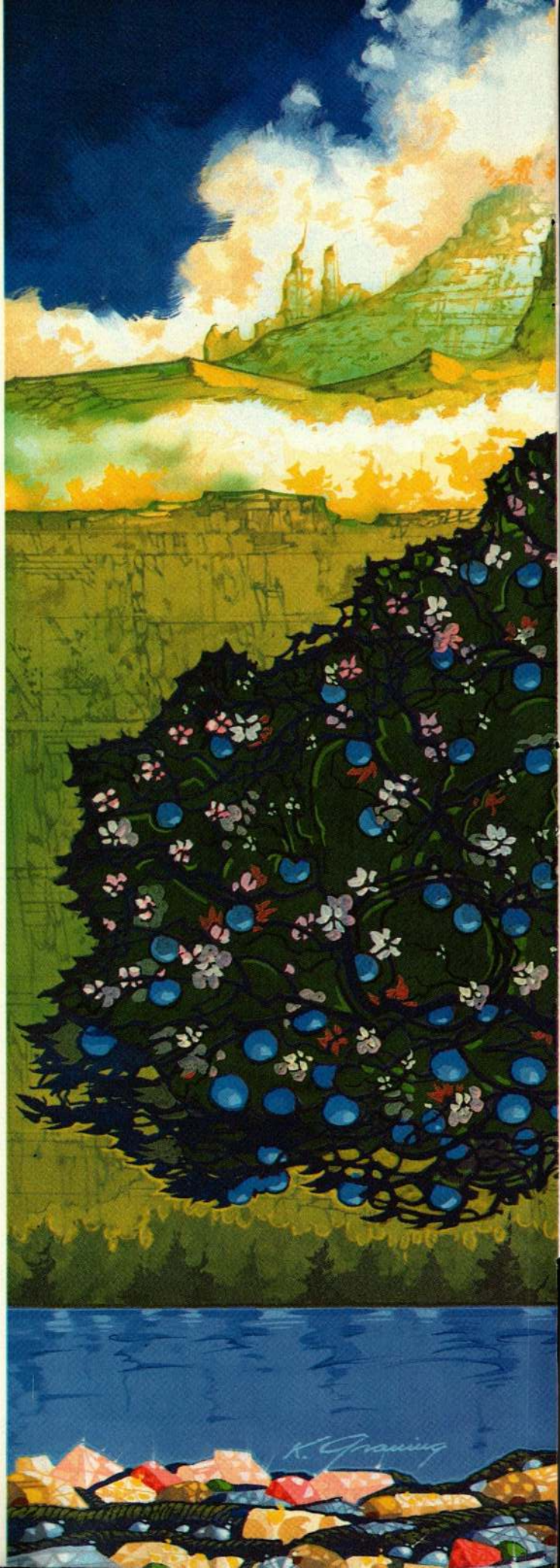
His innocence died on a snowy mountainside. Can he find it there again after all these years?

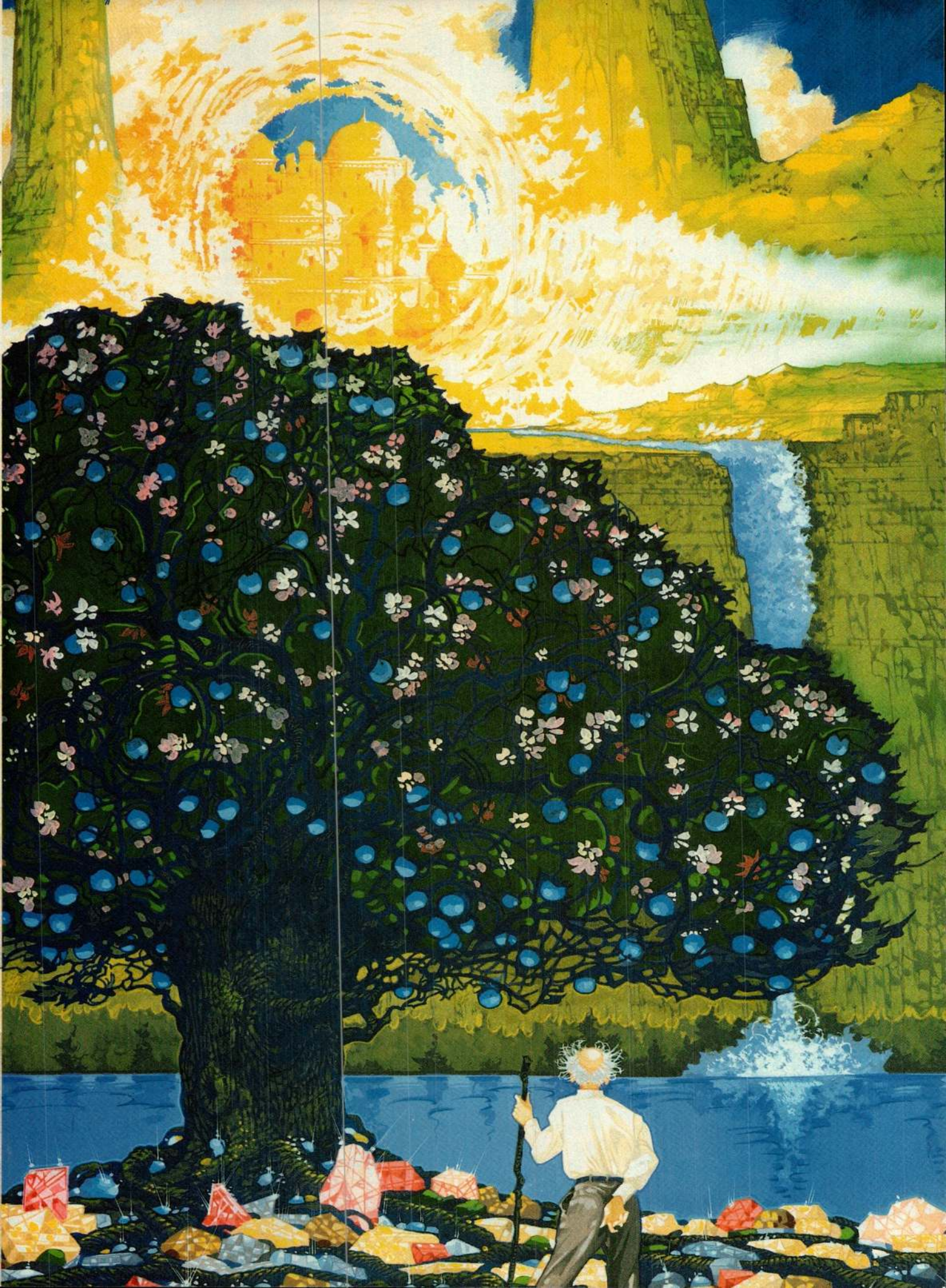
THE OTHER LAND

BY ANDREA SCHLECHT
Illustration by Ken Graning

THE OLD MAN SITS GAZING at the great mountain of his village. He gazes for hours. The mountain's name is Sule. It is the third highest peak in the land, and at its summit, it splits into two not-quite-unscalable spears.

The old man's eyesight is failing him. He sits in a rocking chair on his back porch—the front porch faces the fjord. His view of the summit has become blurred over the years and he sees four, sometimes even six, peaks.





But he can still see its wide base clearly. By a thin waterfall, which flows like silky white hair over the dark rock, he sees a solidly built farmhouse. It is Piott's house. But Piott, his boyhood friend, doesn't live there anymore.

Many other houses stand on Sule's gentle lower slope. But Piott's house stands prominently—and accusingly—in his view.

The old man and his wife Gita are among the few of their age in the village of Fallith. Once there were others, like Piott—a long time ago when they were children. They are gone now, gone to another land beyond the mountain, or possibly within the mountain—who can say which? They left during a rare and luminous instant when Sule, covered with golden light, was the door to...but no. The old man shakes his head to rid himself of idle dreams.

That isn't the way it was at all.

The old man, Yormund, thinks back to that day. It takes a child's eyes to create a vision of such beauty and power, the interweaving of colors, the blending of lights.

HE WAS ELEVEN. HE WAS walking on the path that wriggled along the base of the mountain, looking for chums who, for the moment, had no chores to do. Several new houses—fresh paint, bright colors—had sprung up in the shelter of Sule.

The day was cloudy. Every part of the sky had a thin, fleecy coating, and one low cloud slid down the mountain to the grass line.

Yormund loved the formidable presence of Sule. In it he saw strength, stability, stolid character.

He hoped to find Piott, his favorite playmate, loitering in his yard, and he headed toward the thick-walled house by the waterfall. Piott often said he had trouble getting to sleep unless he could listen to the whisper of the water as it flowed over the rock face.

Piott was not in his yard or anywhere else in sight. Yormund walked to the end of the path, then started up Sule's lower slope. A sprinkling of trees, none taller than Yormund himself, girded the bottom of the mountain.

Yormund hesitated to go beyond the tree line—it was dangerous to go up too high during cloud cover. One could get lost in a descending mist.

Then an opening, like a tunnel, widened in the cloud which lay on the slope. In the thinning of the mist, deep golden sunlight poured through.

It was not the light of the sun he knew. This light transformed everything it illuminated. A trail of brilliant specks glistened in the tunnel, and the sky beyond was no ordinary blue but a blue with a depth which suggested invigorating air, distinctive energies.

The tunnel in the cloud created a brightly lit road over the bare stone of the mountain, and Yormund—all thoughts of danger forgotten—began to stumble toward it. The stone was no longer plain stone. In the otherworldly light he saw great striations of gems. The green ones were surely emeralds, the red ones rubies. Silver and gold rippled among them. But were they truly silver and gold? He would not know until he reached that magical road. He quickened his pace.

The light crept over Yormund. He looked at his hands and they seemed strange, new and beautiful in the glow. Then he looked up.

Far above the tree line on the mountain's southern slope, a tree grew out of the ground of precious stones. Not one of the stunted arctic trees, but a thousand-branched giant, with long leaves, a straight trunk, and huge roots making ridges in the ground. Its shadowless branches—was there shadow in this other land?—

were in full bloom, with the blossoms of a size proportionate to everything else. The tips of some of its branches seemed to brush the twin peaks.

Yormund started, rubbed his eyes, and peered as hard as he could at those peaks. Crowning the mountain were the two great towers of a castle, with several smaller towers and turrets and long battlements in stately symmetry. The architecture involved many domed and bulb-shaped constructions, and it was not at all like the castles of the continent—more like the palaces of the East. Its walls reflected the gold of the ethereal light. And it was as if the branches of the tree, which reached toward battlements and entrances, meant to nourish those who dwelled inside with the fruit promised by the blossoms.

Who was master of this place, and who were the builders who could create such an edifice on a nearly unscalable peak? Surely some ancient winged beings destined never to die.

Yormund began to run. But some things pass so quickly.

Wisps sailed across the tunnel, closing the opening and cutting off the golden light. How long had the vision lasted? A minute? Half a minute? A few seconds?

Yormund looked at his hands. There was nothing unusual about them now. And around him all was as before.

Except that a dream had taken hold of him.

He returned shakily to the village. Piott was in his yard now, pushing his little sister around in a wheelbarrow.

In a near-feverish state, Yormund ran up to him and demanded that they go somewhere to talk privately. Piott tried to send his little sister into the house. Her curiosity piqued, she didn't want to go, but fortunately an older sister came and got her, and the boys found themselves alone.

Yormund told Piott about the transformed mountain, the tree, the castle, and the golden light. When he had finished, Piott said thoughtfully, "You know, there's a story my great-grandfather used to tell me about the mountain. Once a year at midsummer, he said, you can get a glimpse of Paradise from the top of Sule."

"There's another land there, beyond Sule, Paradise or no," Yormund insisted. "It's there and not there, if you know what I mean. And it's not like this land. There's nothing plain or drab in it. Everything is noble and beautiful."

Before long Piott became as excited as Yormund. "I would like to see it, too, the next time. Do you think we could find it somehow?"

"I don't know, but we ought to watch for it. Maybe it's possible to get to it. Perhaps we could become knights there—on flying steeds."

"I never want to be a fisherman like my father," said Piott. "It's a dog's life. If I ever catch a glimpse of that land, I'll be on my way that very moment."

"Let's tell the others," Yormund suggested, "and we can all keep our eyes open for it. The next time one of us sees it, he'll tell the rest and we'll all try to get there."

The "others" were all the children of the village old enough to go where they pleased (well, almost) and young enough not to have to put in a full day's work when not in school. They listened, wide-eyed, as Yormund described his vision and Piott tried to recall his great-grandfather's story, and they, too, became infected with the excitement. Afterwards, all of them mentioned how at one time or another they had seen or thought they had seen something strange on the mountain, or something too beautiful to belong in this world.

Olaf, a stocky twelve-year-old, looked particularly thoughtful. "Maybe what you saw, Yormund, was a faraway land like China or Egypt," he said. "Faraway in the ordinary sense, but the mountain is a door—Sule brings it close. Maybe it's the land your Uncle Peli sailed for."

"India?" The suggestion agitated Yormund, and he spent a moment deep in his own thoughts. Uncle Peli, who was also his godfather, had left for India three years ago, promising many times to write, but no one ever heard from him again.

"Remember the stories Peli told us?" said Olaf. "He was going to ride elephants and hunt tigers and learn how to sit on air above

The next morning, a guide who knew most of the mountains in the country was summoned from another village up the fjord. With a small party of parents, he searched all the slopes of Sule and the wide passes on either side—to no avail. At the end of a week, funeral services were held, for surely the children could not have survived the autumn nights in the damp and cold of the mountains. In the days that followed, Yormund thought of nothing but his friends. He imagined them playing on the shores of the lake that was no ordinary lake, feasting inside the gold-tinged walls of the castle, picking the fruit of the great tree from the castle's battlements, heading inland to a wild country where beasts of legend had their lairs. Yormund had led his friends to this world within worlds, and yet he had not reached it himself.

A search for the children began the next hour. Someone had seen them on the mountain. Yormund and Gita were questioned together. "We ran to see what they were all up to," they said, "and more. The secret had to be safeguarded, because someday, perhaps...."

Before giving up, Yormund realized that the mountain under his feet was no longer the one he had so yearned to climb. He felt no warmth in his soles, saw no brightness in the grasses pressed by their feet, and the rock that broke through was plain gray rock. The castle and the land of gold and magic were gone. He and Gita were left behind.

Gita came out, sloppily dressed and coughing into a handkerchief. Yormund put his arm around her shoulders and led her to the base of the mountain. The first mist was descending. They ran—how they ran, with Gita coughing at every turn!—and then it happened so fast. A second mist mingled with the first and swallowed the mountain, swallowed their vision of beauty. Like some dragon who would eat the sun, it devoured their dream.

As Yormund waited, he could see his friends ascending the mountain. They were moving quickly, impelled by the beauty of the vision. A thick mist was only minutes away but they were already at the edges of the golden light.

"Quick—I'll wait outside while you dress," he said. "I'm not going without you. Yes—and you're going, too," he said. "I'm not going without you. Quick—I'll wait outside while you dress."

she asked, resigned, regretful, expecting to be left behind. "It's today, isn't it?"

Gita's house. She was sitting up in her bed. Her parents and brothers were all away in the family's fishing boat. "It's today, isn't it?"

"All of you go now," Yormund said to them. "I'll get Gita. We can't go without her. She'll never be sick again in the other land."

As the children began to scramble up the slope, Yormund ran to Gita's house. She was sitting up in her bed. Her parents and brothers were all away in the family's fishing boat. "It's today, isn't it?"

hacking cough. "All of you go now," Yormund said to them. "I'll get Gita. We can't go without her. She'll never be sick again in the other land."

Soon a large group was gathered at the foot of the mountain. They could not take their eyes from the scene above them. The only one not among them was Gita, who was sick in bed with a

"Nothing—there's no time," Yormund said. "Hurry!"

"What shall we take with us?" one of the girls asked. child to share the destiny.

Yormund ran through the village, calling the names of his friends. He whispered to each one he met, and each one gazed at the mountain, saw what it had become, and set out to find another

out the vision? Perhaps forever?

There was no time to lose. Another mist was heading for the mountain's summit, and who could say whether it would wipe

at the mountain castle. And the emeralds, the rubies, the gold and silver....

The tree, still decked in blossoms, seemed even taller than before, sending its dome of branches into the sky, standing as if on guard

lifted, there—finally, miraculously—it was.

He should have known as soon as he saw those brilliant points of light glancing off the mist. The mist flowed over the mountain top, veiling it lightly, not quite concealing it, and when the mist

the east, approached it. Thicker clouds followed. But—

Yormund looked up at the mountain. A faint mist, drifting from the twin peaks.

When Yormund's infant sister, just born the previous winter, began to cry, his mother wiped her hands on her apron and hurried into the house. Yormund kept collecting the potatoes into sacks, thinking with some sadness that the fine, warm summer was coming to an end. Nearly all the snow had disappeared from Sule. Only one persistent patch remained in the shadows between

At the end of August that year, autumn arrived with a few stray snowflakes. Yormund was helping his mother in the potato patch behind their house. Most of the potatoes were larger than pebbles.

It had been a good season.

Yormund watched more than anyone. He

dreamed countless dreams of the other land and his life to come in it. Certain things were waiting for him there—he imagined them during sun-filled, sleepless nights. A steed, for instance, winged or otherwise swift. A wilderness to be tamed. A vast lake that was more than a lake—an undersea civilization of high-spirited immortals who thrived in its pillared caves and submarine gardens. It was all waiting for him. He only needed to see the way again.

Yormund watched more than anyone. He

tell at a glance.

one who had ever seen the other land, could

must be it!" But it was not. Yormund, the only

"This is it, isn't it? This

came running at once.

at least half the children

tainside one afternoon,

bow fell on the moun-

HEN THE END OF A RAIN-

time...." And he would leave the rest unspeakable.

But Yormund, looking up, would say, "Sule is very beautiful tonight, but no, that's not it. If you had only seen it then, that one

excited youngster would come running to say, "It's there! It's there!"

cliffs and slopes, Yormund was deluged with false alarms. An

with the sun low in the sky and deep-colored light falling upon

That summer, whenever the mountain top was framed in cloud

mantle of cloud hung stubbornly over the mountain as if to pro-

FOR NEARLY TWO WEEKS THE SUN DID NOT COME OUT. A THICK GRAY

mountain's twin peaks, as always, looked like the towers of a cas-

le, but it was plain that there was no actual castle.

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Fifteen artists transform ancient myth, magic and folklore into personal visions for contemporary eyes.

DREAMWEAVERS

BY CHARLES DE LINT



Y FIRST INTRODUCTION TO ART WAS, AS WITH MOST PEOPLE, the illustrated children's books that were read to me before I could puzzle out the meaning of the words by myself. Those artistic windows into other worlds held me spellbound, especially when they showed me glimpses of places and beings that I could never visit or meet in what Dunsany called the "Fields

delighted by a particular artist's version of the book, other appalled. More often the reaction will vary on a scale of indifference. It seems to me that there are four categories of illustrative art. The first two are almost entwined, separated only by the competence of its execution and the viewer's subjectivity: that which doesn't do the job, and that which does the job, but no more.

More dear to our hearts is the work which we can't divorce from its origin material. A good example of this would be the pen-and-inks and watercolors of Ernest Shepherd. Although there have been many competent renditions of the characters and scenes from *The Wind in the Willows* and *Winnie the Pooh*, for a great number of readers the Shepherd drawings remain indelibly linked to Gr-hame and Milne's texts, to the extent that other versions, such as those by the Disney studios, can only be viewed as aberrations.

Lastly, there is the illustrative work that transcends its original—art that takes inspiration from its source material, depicting it beautifully, but then rising so far above it that it can justifiably be considered on its own terms, rather than simply for its illustrative qualities. It is with the latter that Dream-

Weavers is a traveling exhibition organized by the William King Regional Arts Center in Abingdon, Virginia, co-curated by artist-in-residence Charles Vess and Cindi DiMarzo, a managing editor for the Putnam-

We Know." The artists invited us to encounter all the various aspects of Faerie—from the majestic splendor of John Waterhouse's depictions of Prospero's island, Hal Foster's Camelot and Arthur Rackham's renditions of Teutonic and Norse myths to the simpler visions of Cicely Mary Barker's Flower Fairies and the world of Bolka the Bear of my native Netherlands.

In those days before Spielberg and Lucas made us believe that dinosaurs could walk and spaceships could fly, the Fields We Know held limitations as to what we could be shown of the impossible, and only art—and of course, literature, where we created the pictures in our heads—could take us anywhere and allow us to experience anything.

Like most children, I wasn't particularly discriminating in my appreciation for what I saw, but I absorbed it readily. And while I was certainly fascinated by those two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional objects, I never thought of the process as such at the time. Even as I grew older, I didn't connect illustrative work with the art one found in galleries and museums. My admiration for it had no historical basis; like too many people, I simply viewed it in terms of how well it did its job of illustrating the text and whether or not I liked it.

Art is, of course, subjective; illustrative art particularly so in that its success is most often measured in the same way that film adaptations of novels are measured. Some are







Grosset Group. The aim of the show is to explore folk, fairy tales and other mythic matter as interpreted through works in oils, watercolor, graphite, pen-and-ink, and mixed media. Fifteen of today's leading fantasy and children's book illustrators have contributed to the exhibition, with approximately forty of their original works on display.

In some fine art circles, illustrative art has unjustifiably acquired a certain pejorative

reputation, as though having one's work take its inspiration from an author's text somehow lessens the quality of the artist's talent and vision. What such critics fail to remember is that illustrative art is a branch of narrative painting, a style of art that was at one time considered to be the most worthy subject matter for an artist to render. Visual storytelling can be as subtle, as Pieter Bruegel's *The Fall of Icarus* which, upon first glance appears to be an idyllic pastoral scene; only after studying it more closely does the viewer see Icarus' flailing legs in the water at the bottom right-hand corner of the painting. Or it can be as straightforward as Artemisia Gentileschi's powerful *Judith Beheading Holofernes*.

The source of the story is irrelevant in terms of the work itself. What is important is that the artist communicates the story, the art gaining its resonance and strength through the artist's expertise in the medium and sense of composition and design. In a day and age when the quality of a piece of art is often judged by how well the artist can talk about it, it's refreshing to see that there are still those who hold to some of art's traditional values and, perhaps more importantly, build on them and explore their limits without losing the work's essential *raison d'être*.



PREVIOUS PAGE: From *Dinotopia* by James Gurney.
 LEFT: From *Jack and the Beanstalk* by Scott Gustafson.
 ABOVE: Ruth Sanderson's lovely and evocative maiden searches the Green Wood for her sisters in *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* (Little Brown, 1990).
 BELOW LEFT: Terri Windling's very personal work involves the viewer in the eternal cycle of transformation and rebirth that weaves throughout all our lives in *Metamorphosis*.

Charles Vess is an artist who exemplifies those qualities, and it seems particularly apropos that not only is his work hung in the DreamWeavers show, but that he should be one of the guiding lights behind its existence. "Every picture I do is telling a story," he has said, "whether the viewer fills it in himself from a single work, or whether the story is told in a series of comic panels."

Well-known for his illustrative work on *The Sandman*, a SpiderMan graphic novel set in Scotland, and many other worthy projects and book covers, his subject matter usually eschews the modern world; he might seem to be displaced from an earlier time to the present day if it weren't for his modern eye, his innovative manner of viewing Old World

subjects and his sense of design. One can see the influence of Rackham and Pyle in his line work, and Wyeth and Dulac in his use of color and composition, but his painting retains an individual style that makes it immediately recognizable as his own. What's particularly fascinating is the mood, dimension, and texture he can attain with colored inks, a choice of medium that might seem limited for such effects.

His work is direct, allowing the viewer to digest it as a whole, all in one glance. But at the same time, his paintings aren't linear. Once the immediate story has been absorbed, the viewer's eye is drawn to the subtler subplots that surround the principle focus of interest and the painting becomes a tapestry of stories, woven into a single image.

Stardust is a lovely example of this. The immediate image of the woman crouched by a moonlit pool, bookended by a tree on either side, opens up under closer scrutiny to reveal a host of faeries and other beings, crowding the trees and the mist-drenched background.

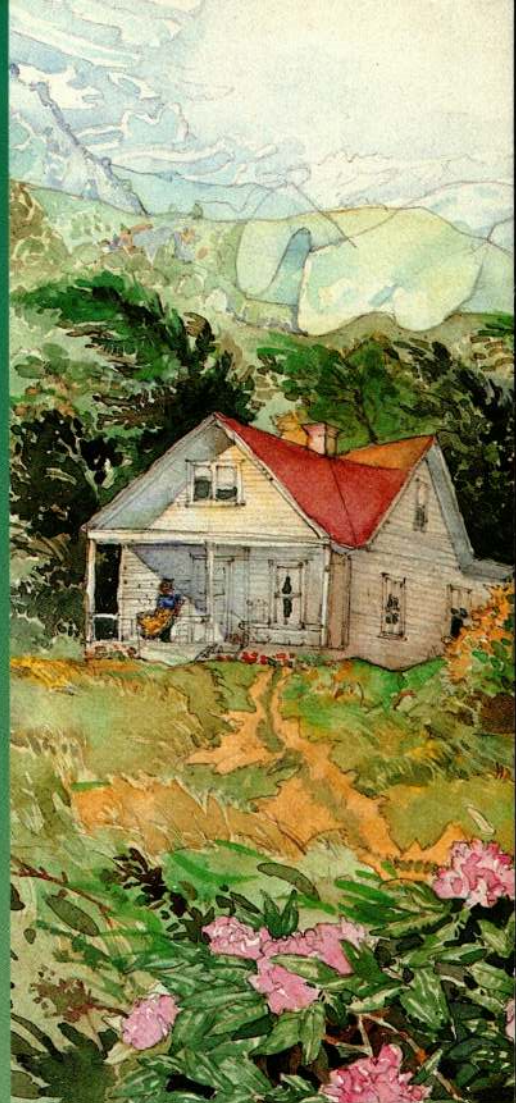
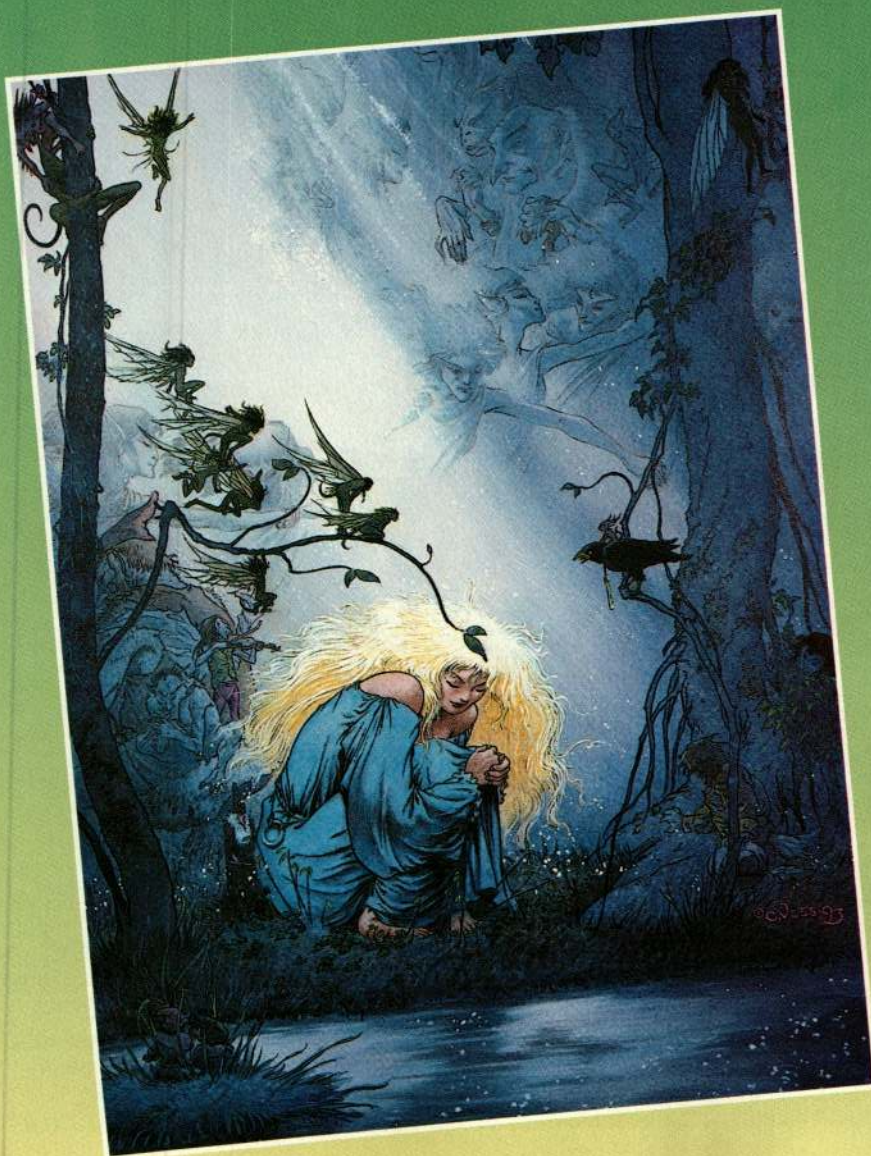
The work of Terri Windling is in almost direct contrast to his, but it still retains its story and resonance. Dividing her time

between a thatched cottage in Devon, England, and a home in the Sonoran desert outside of Tucson, Arizona, her paintings are likewise divided in subject matter between spirits of the English woodlands and those of the American Southwest. What links them is her artist's eye and her palette of subtle earth tone hues.

Eschewing Vess' tight drawing, her paintings gain their potency through her use of the oil washes that lend the paintings such a luminous quality. Her figures appear to be loosely rendered, but each is built up with numerous layers of almost transparent color washes before the final opaque details are added. In addition, once the painting is done, she often adds her subplots by way of collage—lace and pages from old books are sewn onto the canvas, as well as leaves, twigs, feathers, old coins, painted fabrics and any number of other found objects.

The ensuing work, as can be seen in *Metamorphosis*, makes for a powerful and arresting image that draws the viewer deeper into the subject's story with these resonant details.

At first glance, David Wisniewski's work



appears to gain its inspiration from the ink and watercolor paintings of West Coast Native-American artists. But one soon sees that his vibrant images are created from applications of cut paper, giving his work its powerful contrasts in shape and tone. Wisniewski turned to such vivid image-making from a background as a puppeteer. *Rain Player* gives the appearance of a scene taken directly from one of those shadow plays, reveling in a simplicity of shapes and colors.

If Wisniewski came to art by way of children's theater, then surely James Gurney is a transplanted Pre-Raphaelite. His oils have the open feel and wealth of detail typified in the work of Burne-Jones, with the grandeur in subject matter of Sir Lawrence Alma Tadema or Waterhouse. Long renowned for his book covers and illustrative work for magazines such as *National Geographic*, his most recent tour de force is the gorgeous art he has rendered for his own *Dinotopia*, from which *Garden of Hope* is taken.

Like Vess, Michael Kaluta comes out of the comic book field and his art, too, is very much centered around line work and subtler coloring—watercolor, gouache, colored pencils, wax crayons. Playfully inventive, and not the least concerned with the thought that



not consider it in the same light.

Jerry Pinkney's medium of choice is also watercolor, individualized by his rich palette and his impressionistic technique. *Miranda & Brother Wind*, shown here, comes from the book by Patricia McKissack of the same title and is a wonderful example of Pinkney's storytelling ability and gifted use of his medium, from the soft focus of the landscape as the brushstrokes merge one into the other from the middleground until they fade away into the background, to the detailing of Miranda on her porch, the ghostly figure of the wind, and the haystacks below him.

In the DreamWeavers exhibition, Vess and DiMarzo have gathered together a roster of the best the illustrative field has to offer: Alicia Austin, Brian Froud, Alan Lee, David Christiana, Gennady Spirin, Scott Gustafson and Dawn Wilson, as well as the artists mentioned elsewhere in this article. The works range from the romantic oils of Ruth Sanderson's *The Silver Woods*, to Dennis Nolan's *Madam Mim*, with its wonderfully controlled use of watercolors, and the many other mediums in between.

The paintings are shown in reproduction here, and so not only are the works much reduced in size, but the viewer also loses the

LEFT: Artwork by Charles Vess from *Stardust* with Neil Gaiman. ABOVE: Jerry Pinkney brings to life the Southern Appalachian landscape, its people and their folklore from a black person's perspective in *Mirandy* and *Brother Wind* by Patricia McKissack (Knopf, 1989). BELOW: Dennis Nolan has achieved a lifelong ambition in illustrating T.H. White's classic tale *The Sword in the Stone* (Philomel, 1993). Here the menacing Madam Mim considers the evil she may do to the young King Arthur.

richness of their colors and the sense of the surface detail—the brushwork, the weave of the canvas, the impasto of the oil paint, and the delicate washes of the watercolors, one laid over the other. I can only recommend that you take in this show if it comes to your area and keep an eye out for the illustrated catalogue that will accompany it for a rare glimpse into the personal dreams woven here for us by some of the best illustrators in the field. ♣

Editor's Note: For more information about the DreamWeavers exhibit and its venues you may contact the William King Arts Center at 703-628-5005.

some of the fugitive colors he uses might fade away over the years, he has even painted with red wine on one of his illustrations for a reissue of Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis*, with coffee and tea for the flesh tones. *The Fate of Dollies Lost in Dreams*, though rendered in watercolor, still shows that whimsical side to his nature, although the tumbling doll might



*Humans may come and go but the stars in their courses stay fixed forever.
Or do they?*

A LITTLE MOONSHINE

BY CONNIE WILLIS

Illustration by Charles Demorat

NO ONE WAS LOOKING. ARTEMIS EXTENDED HER FOOT, FLEXED IT IN its silver slipper, and then pulled it back slowly. It was against the rules, but it was ridiculous to ask her to hold a position like that forever without her foot going to sleep. Anyway, nobody was looking. Come to think of it, where was everybody? There was not a soul in sight. She waited a minute to be sure and then, bracing her hands behind her on a narrow perch, dangled both her feet over the edge.

DIANA WORKED HER WAY CAREFULLY ACROSS THE CROWDED CAFETERIA. SHE WAS WEARING a silvery-white dress and a pair of flimsy silver sandals whose straps kept slipping off her heels. She was sorry she had not worn jeans and a sweater, and irritated that she felt that way.

"It's the New Year's Eve party," she said defensively to Cassie, who was wearing sequins and slingback pumps.

"It's interesting you should put it that way," Cassie said. "*The Kitt Peak* New Year's Eve party. I was just standing here thinking that that's exactly what it is. The same party. It stays in place and we come around to it year after year."

Diana considered that. Hunter had just been talking about the slowly circling zodiac constellations, coming back to the same place in the sky at the same time each year. Pisces, Taurus, and the New Year's Eve party. "Last year the radio astronomer from Texas wasn't here," she said.

"No," Cassie said, looking at the round man with the crewcut and bolo tie who was talking to Hunter. "But the one from Greenbank was." The one from Greenbank had worn a string tie instead. They both had corny accents and even cornier lines.

"Umm," Diana said, stalling. She moved up to the improvised bar one of the Schmidt people was officiating over.

"Two champagnes?" he said.

"No," Diana said, alarmed. "One champagne and a scotch." She turned back to Cassie. "It's only eight o'clock. Anything could happen between now and midnight." She reached for the two paper cups. "You don't know."

"Oh, but I do know," Cassie said. "Hunter will expound on various lunatic-fringe theories to which you will listen with open adoration. Our friend from Texas will lunge at both of us with some line like 'You are my lucky star.' At nine o'clock you will change into jeans and go with Hunter to check on the Mayall because you have switched watches with Leo so he can put the make on some little blonde from the University of Arizona telescope and you can be alone with Hunter. I will have high hopes for you, but Hunter will come back still expounding and I will be so overwhelmed by the feeling that our destinies are locked in by the stars that I'll end up going home with the bartender just because he's a Gemini. We have to. Anything else is against the rules." She looked sympathetically at Diana. "It's in the stars."

"How can you believe in that astrology junk when you're an astronomer?" Diana said, peering into the paper cups. The bartender had either put soda in her scotch or poured her two champagnes. She had no business drinking champagne tonight, not with things going the way they were already. Hunter with his talk of the trapped zodiac, circling helplessly overhead, Cassie with her predictions that they were as trapped as the stars, that nothing would ever happen. She had worn this dress and these stupid sandals for the express purpose of making something happen, and all that had happened so far was that one of her sandal straps, loose as it was, had cut off the circulation, and her foot had gone to sleep. Champagne only made it worse. She never got drunk. She got bored. So bored she would go to any lengths to make something happen.

"I used to believe in free will," Cassie said, "But I never saw a shred of evidence for it. You think we're not as firmly locked in place as the constellations? You take one good look at our fat friend from Texas. Very nice guy, in spite of the corn. Deserves something out of life besides rejection, but he won't get it from either of us, because you're hung up on Hunter and I'm hung up on compatible signs."

"Even the constellations probably break out sometimes," Diana said irrationally. "Even they get bored, sometimes to the point where they don't care if it's against the rules."

"You're saying that because the sun's in Capricorn, the stubborn old goat, and Cancer's rising."

"I am not," Diana said crabbily, and took her paper cups across the cafeteria to Hunter.

ARTEMIS GOT BORED WITH DANGLING HER FEET AND LOOKED AROUND for someone to tell about the new development. Her nearest neighbor wouldn't care one way or the other—definitely a cold fish. The one across the way might, though. He at least had a little spirit, even if he was ill-tempered.

She put one hand up for balance and pulled her slipper off with the other. She held it in her hand a minute, judging the distance, and then shied it at him. He was a good distance away, and she watched with interest to see if it would fall short. It didn't. It landed squarely on his back.

"You," she said, leaning out toward him and shouting. "Wake up. The cat's away."

He opened one eye, fixed her with an irritated stare, and then scut-

tled away. The shoe slipped off his back and fell, glittering down and away.

"You old crab!" she shouted at him. "I was just trying to pep things up. Nothing ever happens around here."

He blinked at her from his new position and closed his eye again.

Artemis pulled her knees up to her chin and sat still, tapping her foot impatiently.

ONE OF THE CUPS LOOKED A LITTLE BUBBLIER THAN THE OTHER. Diana handed that one to Hunter and took a sip of the other. Wrong. This was the champagne. Hunter hadn't touched his yet. He was telling the radio astronomer from Texas his theory. She sat down on the edge of a table and waited, more or less patiently, for him to take a drink of her scotch so they could exchange glasses.

"Take astrology," Hunter said, waving his paper cup at the Texan. "The basic idea is that the constellations and the moon influence our behavior. Around that is a whole body of pseudo-proofs, gravitational forces and points of stress, proofs that have been discredited by science. So the basic idea's been discredited, too. But should it have been?"

He took a quick sip from the cup and went on before Diana could even get her smile and apology started. "OK, but what possible effect can they have on us, you say? If it's not gravity, what is it? Strong and weak forces? Solar wind? No, you say, their sphere of physical effect is inversely proportional to their distance from us. Then what, you say?"

Actually the Texan had not said anything. Scientists should only be allowed to talk shop, Diana thought. Hunter was eminently reasonable when they were analyzing the Betelgeuse data. The radio astronomer from Texas had the reputation of being a brilliant lecturer. You would never know it from this conversation. Cassie, top-ranking expert in solar spectrography, asked every man in sight what his sign was. And Diana, she, Diana, lunar cartographer, sat on a table swinging her legs and thinking about doing something drastic. She took a sip of Hunter's champagne.

"You may think this is a crazy idea," he was saying, "but if you go back to the very beginnings of astrology, before all the hocus-pocus, what do you have?"

"Fairy tales," Diana said.

The Texan looked interestedly at her. Hunter peered into his scotch.

"Fairy tales," she repeated. "That's what you have left. The goddess of the moon draws a bead on a big black thing and it turns out to be her boyfriend Orion, so they put him in the sky, still wearing his fancy belt." She took a defensive gulp of the champagne. "That's what you have."

"Exactly," Hunter said, while the Texan continued to look at her. "And it's there, in those fairy tales, that we have to look for the key."

The Texan's interested look was rapidly degenerating into a leer. Diana crossed her legs and grabbed at a bottle of champagne the bartender was circulating with. The Texan took the bottle from her and filled her cup, then turned back to Hunter. "You don't mean you believe they're people, do you?" he said.

"No, not people, not gods and goddesses, but organisms. Organisms whose nervous systems are stars," Hunter said.

"If they are people," Diana said, "I'll bet they're bored to tears." She felt a sudden impulse to kick her shoe clear across the room to where Cassie and her Gemini were standing. Just to see what would happen. Probably nothing, and she would get a smug lecture on how the moon and Cancer were making her act this way.

"What if the ancients recognized, in a pre-scientific way, of course, and mixed with a lot of fairy-tale trappings, but nevertheless recognized that the constellations were intelligent organisms. Intelligent organisms have any number of effects on the environment around them, including us."

"But what proof is there that they're intelligent?" the Texan said. "Or even alive? There's no growth, no movement."

"How can they move with us watching all the time?" Diana said.

"What if all we could see of a human was a single cell in the knee and one in the shoulder blade? And we were limited to seeing those two cells only in still photographs from a distance light-years away?"

How much movement could we see?"

"They move when nobody's looking," Diana said. "They move during the Kitt Peak New Year's Eve party." Her sandal was dangling free. She kicked, and it came off and rolled a foot on the carpet. The Texan stooped, picked it up, and brought it to her, taking her stockinged foot in his hand.

"You know what you look like sitting there?" he said, tenderly holding her foot. "Like you should be swinging on a star."

She yanked her foot free, grabbed her sandal, and jammed it on her foot. "Listen," she said, "you see that girl over there, the one with the sequins? She looks like she should be swinging from a whole constellation." She jumped off the table. "Come on, Hunter," she said, "it's time to go check Orion's dislocated shoulder."

"HEY," ARTEMIS CALLED. "HEY! YOU WITH THE BELT! WHAT'S UP?"

She didn't get any response. He didn't even turn to look at her.

"Hey!" she said more loudly. "Where is everybody?"

He still faced stolidly away from her. Dumb. Big and dumb. She pulled her other slipper off and threw it at him. It hit him square in the chest and then bounced off, falling away in a sudden blaze of light.

"You're not supposed to do that," he said.

"Why not? Nobody's watching. Nobody."

THEY MOVE WHEN nobody's looking," Diana said. "They move during the Kitt Peak New Year's Eve party." Her sandal was dangling free. She kicked, and it came off and rolled a foot on the carpet. The Texan stooped, picked it up, and brought it to her, taking her stockinged foot in his hand.

He looked around, and Artemis waited, more or less patiently, rubbing one bare foot against the other. After what seemed to her time enough for him to come up with some startling theory, he said, "I think you're right."

"I think," she said, speaking slowly and distinctly, but still managing to sound coy, "if there's anything you've been wanting to do, now would be the time to do it."

ONE OF DIANA'S SHOES CAME COMPLETELY OFF ON THE WAY TO THE Mayall. Hunter had asked her at the door of the cafeteria if she was going to change clothes and she had snapped, "I can manage," and started off across the treacherous gravel, wanting to break a heel, fall down the mountainside, dislocate her shoulder and be rescued by Papago Indians or a helicopter from Tucson. All that had happened, however, was that she had nearly frozen to death on her way up the hill, and the strap of her shoe had slid down again, so that she had stepped completely out of it.

Diana dropped down on a rock to put it back on and then sat there a minute, watching the sky. She looked for Orion, almost directly overhead, and used him to locate Taurus and the rest of the zodiac along the ecliptic: Taurus, Gemini, Leo. They did not look much like hulking organisms.

Hunter was looking out over the plain to the pinkish glow of Tucson. "Supposing they are intelligent, what kind of influence would they have on us? Would they actually interfere in human affairs, as the ancients believed, or are they only benign watchers, the guardians of the universe?"

"I don't think they pay much attention to us," Diana said. She was not paying much attention to him. She was trying to name the zodiac constellations as she had memorized them. Leo, Gemini, Taurus. That was not right. Cancer had to come in there somewhere. No, there was Cancer in the north, next to the Big Dipper. But that was impossible. Cassie had said Cancer was rising. The moon was far to

the west, a silvery crescent obscuring Pisces. So Cancer should be east of it. And what was it doing so far north of the ecliptic?

"Maybe their effect on us is chemical," Hunter said, standing over her.

"Like champagne," she murmured, wondering if it had made her drunk after all, so drunk the constellations had slipped out of place.

"Like scotch," Hunter said obscurely and took off toward the looming nineteen-story Mayall telescope.

The Crab is a zodiac constellation, Diana thought, following him. What on earth is it doing way up there?

ARTEMIS SAT VERY STILL, HER KNEES DRAWN UP SHARPLY UNDER HER chin. Honestly, just when she was starting to make a little progress. "They've gone back inside," she said, without moving.

No answer.

"I said, it's safe now. They're gone."

He said stiffly, "You shouldn't take chances like that. It could be dangerous."

Dangerous, my foot, she thought, but she said contritely, "I know. It's just that I get so lonely." He looked at her interestedly.

"I wish I could be next to you," she said wistfully.

The look was rapidly degenerating into a leer. She decided to press

her advantage. "There's nobody down here to talk to. That old crab wouldn't even..."

Mistake. He stopped, looked over his shoulder, and stiffened. "What in the hell have you done to Cancer?"

"ANYTHING HAPPENING?" DIANA SAID, COMING INTO THE computer room. She had put the order of the zodiac out of her mind as she came up in the elevator and only briefly glanced at the slit of sky above the massive telescope, which was almost horizontal, pointing its huge mirrors at the west. Cassie was right. They were going to take the readings and go back to the party, as predictable as the stars. She might as well have worn jeans and been warm because nothing was going to happen, now or ever.

"Nothing much going on," Hunter said, and handed her the night's readouts. They were only doing the routine secondary-focus stuff tonight. They wouldn't start the complex speckle interferometry work until February, when Orion wasn't so awkwardly overhead.

"Hunter," Diana said, putting her hand on his arm, "does the telescope still have a fix on Betelgeuse?"

He flipped to the spectrograph reading, the familiar fingerprint of the red giant. "Yeah. No change."

"That's a direct visual? From the primary focus?"

"Of course."

She frowned at the screen. "Then why's the Mayall lying on its side?" she said. She was out of her chair and out the door before Hunter could get a verification on the computer's tracking system.

He emerged onto the platform above the telescope, saying, "It's still tracking," and stopped. "Orion's overhead," he said. "What the hell's the telescope doing lying on its back?"

Diana was halfway to the catwalk on the other side of the telescope. She pulled herself up onto the bottom landing of the open metal stair and kicked off her shoes.

"What are you doing?" Hunter said, looking up at her. "It isn't

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MOONSHINE

Continued from page 67

the shutter gears that have gone haywire. We're still getting a computer fix on Betelgeuse. It's the computer that's wrong."

"No, it isn't," Diana said, looking down at him from halfway up the curve of the dome. "It's the sky that's wrong. Orion's not overhead. I'll bet you anything he's over making time with his old girlfriend the moon. I'm going to take a look."

"What?" Hunter shouted, and scrambled up the catwalk after her. "Wouldn't it be simpler just to walk outside and look at the sky?"

"No," Diana said, nearly to the landing opposite the open slit in the dome. "Besides, they'd see us." The wind was blowing in through the opening. It blew Diana's hair back off her face and shimmered her white dress.

"Who?" Hunter said, climbing onto the narrow platform. He grabbed her by both arms. "Who's going to see us?"

"Your cosmic organisms. Your ancient gods and goddesses. They're not watching us. They're up there fooling around when we're not watching them, teasing the crab and cozing up to each other." She pulled slightly away. "I want to catch them at it."

He held on tightly. "You believe that junk?" he said unbelievably.

She stopped resisting and looked directly at him. "Aren't I supposed to?"

"How can you believe the moon's up there goosing Orion with her little bow and arrow? I suppose you believe that Texan's line, too. You should be swinging on a star."

She shrugged out of his grip and backed a step away from him. "I should be," she said. "I should be anywhere but up here with you." She was so outraged she almost pitched off the narrow landing. He put out a hand to steady her. "If I wasn't supposed to believe your theories, exactly what was I supposed to do?"

He didn't remove his hand. "I don't know. I...the New Year's Eve party is always the same, do you realize that? Cassie asks everybody what his sign is. The little blonde from AU asks me to take her rounds so she can put the make on Leo. You sit on tables, swinging your legs and looking as bored as I feel. And I think, we are going around in circles. Nothing different is ever going to happen."

"So I made up a bunch of nonsense. I thought...I don't know what I thought."

"I do," Diana said.

"I should never drink scotch," he said. "It makes me believe anything's possible, even the constellations coming unglued, even me kissing you at the top of the Mayall."

Diana put her arms around his neck. "Anything is," she said.

"I AM NOT A TROUBLEMAKER!" ARTEMIS SAID, so outraged she nearly toppled off her perch.

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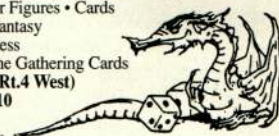
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He put out a hand to steady her.

"You are," he said grimly. "What about the time you shot me with your bow and arrow?"

"That was an accident," she said indignantly. "I thought you were a fish." He drew himself up, and she added hastily, "A shark. I thought you were a shark. You're still mad about that, aren't you?"

"No," he said. "Not about that. Shooting at a shark is one thing, but a harmless crab!"

"I didn't shoot him," she said. "I only threw a shoe at him."

"It's against the rules," he said, but he didn't remove his hand.

"Lots of things are against the rules," she said cheerfully, and put her arms around his neck.

BY TEN-THIRTY CASSIE HAD EXHAUSTED EVERY means of avoiding the radio astronomer and had slipped outside the cafeteria door when she saw him heading unmistakably toward her. Now she stood watching the sky. The moon had nearly set, and the zodiac constellations marched evenly behind her, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo.

"Well, here you are!" said the Texan. "What're you doing out here by yourself?"

"I'm an astronomer," she said curtly. "I'm looking at the stars."

"They should be looking at you in that dress. You look like..."

"I know, I know, I should be swinging on a star," she said, looking up the hill toward the Mayall. Diana and Hunter were coming down the hill. Diana's sandals were securely on her feet. Hunter was not talking.

Well, what do you know? Cassie said to herself. I may go back to believing in free will. She turned to the radio astronomer. "How would you like to see the McMath solar telescope?" she said. "I'll give you a moonlight tour."

"At night?" he said. "I never heard of looking at the sun by moonlight. Isn't that against the rules?"

"Lots of things are against the rules," Cassie said cheerfully.

ARTEMIS LEANED INTO THE CRESCENT OF THE moon, resting her chin against her hands. "They're back," she said drowsily. "I see three, no four of them."

Orion nodded. "The party's over," he said, and leered sleepily at her.

"Do you think they have any effect on us?" Artemis said. "I mean, they watch us all the time. Maybe the old legends are true, and they do influence our behavior."

"Not a chance," Orion said. "So they watch us, so what? So they shoot a few puny arrows at us. Nobody influences my behavior. Nobody puts ideas in my head."

From across the sky, back in line but still keeping his distance, Cancer opened one eye.

Artemis yawned. "You're probably right," she said. She smiled at the crab. He winked at her.

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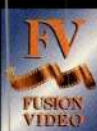
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BY MARK C. SUMNER

Adventuring with book, computer, and a sack full of puns.

BACK IN 1977, PIERS ANTHONY INTRODUCED THE WORLD TO XANTH WITH THE BOOK *A Spell for Chameleon*. That book went on to win a number of awards, and was quickly followed by another pair of Xanth adventures. But Xanth violated the unofficial fantasy code and went beyond three books, then beyond five, and even beyond ten. There are currently...well, I have no idea how many Xanth books there are. Lots. Seventeen years after this fantasy world was introduced to readers, Anthony shows no sign of slowing down. This suspiciously Florida-shaped piece of mythical real estate is probably the most tromped over parcel of land in all of fantasy. And now those who have enjoyed the books can treat themselves to a trip through Xanth on their computers.

Legend Entertainment worked closely with Piers Anthony to create their game, *Companions of Xanth*, in conjunction with Anthony's latest Xanth novel, *Demons Don't Dream*. The result is a unique overlap of book and game in which the book appears in the game and the game plays a major role in the book. In a way, the book also acts as an elaborate clue book to the game. To make things convenient, a copy of the book is packaged inside.

Technically the game is not quite the cutting edge. The parser consists of verbs down the left, with objects across the bottom. The objects are shown as icons, while the words are shown as text (Good thing—trying to interpret verbs shown as icons can lead to beating the mouse against the screen.). The result is an interface that's clean and easy to use, but not particularly innovative. In short, it looks like seventy-five percent of the adventures put on the market in the last two years.

In the remaining screen area the player is provided with a graphic of the current scene. The images are well

done, with a high degree of fidelity to the Xanth artwork that has appeared on book covers, calendars, etc. If you're a Xanth fan, you won't have any trouble picking out your favorite characters on sight. In a few places, the background graphics are somewhat indistinct and a bit dull, but in just as many places they are spectacular.

Those players who nab the CD version of the game will find it filled with speech. Over thirty different characters talk for themselves, adding quite a bit of atmosphere. There is also live action footage in the CD version. Not enough to call this game a multimedia showcase, but enough to add a nice flavor to critical scenes.

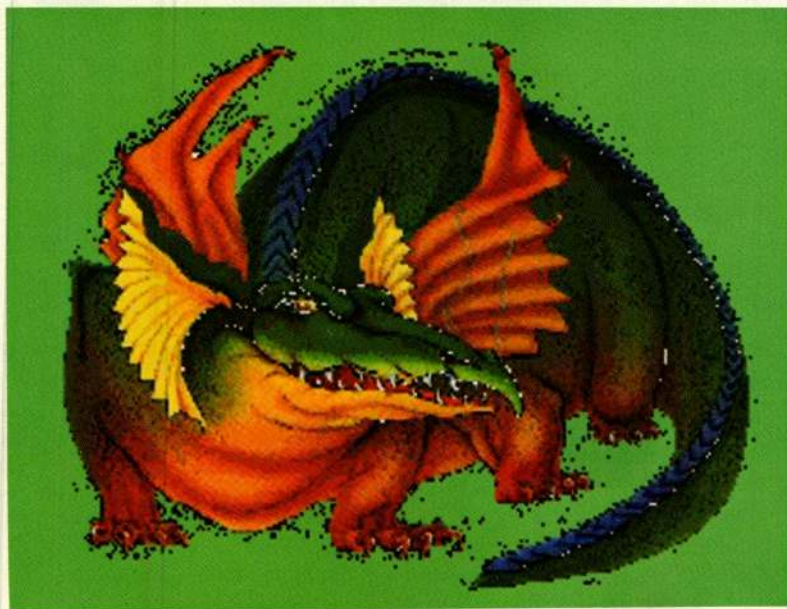
So, *Companions of Xanth* looks like Xanth. Does it play like Xanth? Yes. You play Dug Mundane, a kid from the "real" world who stumbles into the world of Xanth by way of a computer game. In Xanth, a mundane is any nonmagical person from outside Xanth's rather permeable boundaries. Dug, like the rest of us, has never experienced magic except between the covers of a book. In the game, your character competes with another outsider—Kim Mundane. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem possible to play as Kim, perpetuating the "computers are for guys" impression that is so painfully common.

Xanth, for those that have somehow avoided the flood of books, is a land composed of one part fantasy cliché and ten parts puns. Most every creature or plant you run into has properties based on some play on words. Xanth is the kind of place where you get your shoes from a shoe tree and lyre birds strum out tunes. Not only are the creatures you meet defined by this type of twisted word play, the solutions to the majority of puzzles you will face are also found by looking for alternative definitions and double-entendre.

For the most part, these puns can be puzzled out with a little thought and the game progresses through the usual sequence of posers. A general familiarity with Xanth will go a long way toward preventing frustration. Few of these conundrums are truly opaque. If you're really stuck, you can consult the way the literary Dug handled these obstacles in the companion book. But don't expect a step-by-step solution. Legend has made sure that most puzzles don't exactly match their paper counterparts.

The relationship between book and game brings up an odd problem with this adventure. The game is struc-

The player comes nose-to-nose with the Gap Dragon, one of the many favorite Xanth characters found in *Companions of Xanth*.



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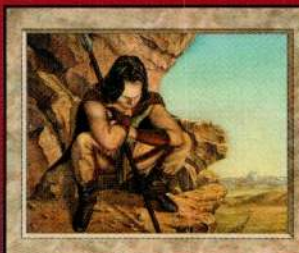
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tured so that your character will come to encounter most of the situations featured in the book. If you don't read the book, the game can seem a little lifeless. If you do read the book, it can lose some of the joy of discovery. The tight integration of the book and the game is quite a trick, but they may ultimately come at the price of gameplay.

The most disappointing restriction placed on the game to keep it parallel with the book is the elimination of all but one possible "companion." The *Companions of Xanth* game in the book offers the choice of several possible Xanth characters to act as your partner and guide within the game. The actual *Companions of Xanth* game appears to offer that same flexibility, with an opening scene in which you select from a number of choices. But in fact, most of these companions are worse than useless. The game seems to be unsolvable unless you make the same selection as the literary Dug. This is where the game really misses the chance to break free of the book and offer something different.

Now, having declared that *Companions of Xanth* is a good, but unexceptional adventure, let me also state that many of my complaints will probably not matter to the real Xanth fan. For fans of Piers Anthony's never ending series, *Companions of Xanth* can provide a welcome chance to stroll around this pun-filled land. For those who aren't familiar with Xanth, this game will be a serviceable, good quality adventure, but perhaps a bit brief. Those who are not Xanth fans, but who like other humorous fantasy, may want to try this adventure as a good introduction to the "flavor" of Xanth. And for those that don't like puns there is only one solution—run away! Run away!

Vampire (White Wolf) and Ravenloft (TSR), two new role-playing games, turn to creatures of the night.

Dwarves, and elves, and halflings. Thieves, and wizards, and priests. There was a time when it was easy to call out the catalog of role-playing characters. Spill a handful of dice, stab your finger down on any open page of a traditional fantasy novel, and you had all the necessary ingredients. Since the origin of "modern" role-playing, role-playing games (RPGs) have been primarily based on a kind of Tolkien-esque universe in which elves cooperate with humans, while dark orcs hide behind the next bend of a seemingly endless dungeon.

In some ways, this set limitations on what role-playing could do. On the other hand, ingenious writers and players have managed to wring almost endless permutations from



High-fidelity graphics depict Piers Anthony's pun-filled land of Xanth.

the set pieces provided. Skillful players have invested their creations with a life of their own. For many RPG players, it's still dragon season, and the majority of them aren't complaining.

But should a gamer fancy some other skin to slip under, they should take heart. Or maybe that should be "take fang." Additions to the role-playing genre have emphasized horror and dark fantasy. Instead of a halfling, gamers now can take on the role of werewolf. Instead of a ranger tracking down a lost treasure deep inside vast caverns, you can become a reporter investigating the strange goings-on in a seacoast town where all the people are starting to look decidedly odd.

While there are certainly a number of role-playing games in this area that merit a look, two of the most interesting are White Wolf's *Vampire* system, and TSR's *Ravenloft* addition to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. That's not to say that there are not better or more original role-playing games in the dark fantasy/horror genre. What makes these two games so interesting is the opposing approach they take to material that, at its heart, is very similar.

White Wolf's *Vampire* is probably the current flagship of horror gaming. Though expansions allow for a whole host of night crawlers, the heart of the game lies with the title bloodsuckers. In White Wolf's scheme, vampires represent an unseen, but ever present dark side to our world. The play is modern, hip, and sometimes hip deep in the red stuff.

No matter what type of vampire puts the bite on your imagination, White Wolf has your type. They've divided the world of vampiredom into tribes, each of which has a few clearly defined characteristics. For those

that watched *The Lost Boys* for more than a glimpse of Jami Gertz, there is the street punk Brujah tribe. For those that like the traditional Lugosi, the Ventrue will probably fill the bill. Anne Rice fans can find their kin-things here, and even those who like the twisted-tooth look of Nosferatu have...well, the Nosferatu.

The emphasis in *Vampire* is on storytelling. To support this, White Wolf has provided an extensive and well-written back story. In fact, the primary *Vampire* manual (which carries the subtitle "The Masquerade") is one of the mostly clearly laid out, enjoyable game manuals you're likely to run across in any genre. If you never intend to roll a die or flash a fang, you can read this manual for the pure pleasure of it and come away with admiration for the fine job done within.

Of course, *Vampire* is a game, and to play the game requires some rolling of dice and maintenance of a rather elaborate character sheet.

Though the game play is actually fairly straightforward and simple, a strict interpretation of the rules will quickly bring the game to a snail's pace. But a good game master—in *Vampire* parlance, the Storyteller—will keep you from being burdened by statistics. In most situations, it's how well you act your character that determines the outcome of encounters in *Vampire*. If you are charming, then the people you encounter are likely to be charmed. If you are bullying, you will be treated as a bully. The story flows around your actions and weaves a tale of dark machinations and deadly seduction. It can be an intoxicating experience.

The best sessions of *Vampire* leave you with some of the same feelings you might have after slipping out for a night on the town and doing questionable things in even more questionable company. You feel as if you've done something slightly evil—and you want to do it again.

The same creatures of the night that populate *Vampire* also make up the core characters for TSR's *Ravenloft* gaming world. *Ravenloft* follows in a line of expansion worlds for use in the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* (AD & D) gaming system. Like other such expansion systems, *Ravenloft* adds more than just previously uncharted territory to the AD&D universe. It provides a land with a background and a sense of history, complete with a cast of scheming Dark Lords, each of which rules one of the "domains" within the continent of Ravenloft.

Ravenloft is a dark and twisted place. Within its savage boundaries, there is little kindness and even less that's truly good. This is a place for the most completely evil of characters, and for those poor souls that they have dragged with them in their descent to

this corrupt land. Many of the creatures which populate the normal AD&D worlds are also to found in *Ravenloft*, but the powers of the dark are magnified. Vampires and werewolves, generally only a moderate nuisance in the depths of an AD&D dungeon, are transformed into powerful creatures within *Ravenloft*'s borders.

Like several other of TSR's expansions to their venerable system, *Ravenloft* seems to be a direct response to the popularity of games like *Vampire*. It's not unusual for game companies to quickly make forays into popular areas. After all, many of the companies got their start in doing knockoffs of the original *Dungeons & Dragons*. This imitation of success within the gaming community continues, with every company and their brothers rushing to get out a card game in response to the phenomenal success of Wizards of the Coast's *Magic* card system.

But TSR's approach to getting into a new gaming area differs from that taken by other companies. Instead of creating new games, TSR only creates new places. Under the vast umbrella of AD&D, you can visit a number of traditional fantasy worlds, fly into space with *Spelljammer*, dabble on the dark side with *Ravenloft*, or go to the incredibly mean and nasty world of *Dark Sun*, where even the halflings are cannibals.

For the most part, this umbrella approach works well. Most of these worlds are early medieval at best, and problems that can't be

solved with a conversation are quickly tackled by spell or sword. But for *Ravenloft*, the AD&D world wears like an extra large suit of armor on a regular horror frame. *Ravenloft* is a world that constantly labors under a kind of game system schizophrenia, due to the time frame and technology levels. On the one hand, you have the background and characters of *Ravenloft*. These include a Doctor Frankenstein clone, a Vlad Tepes wannabe, riverboat captains, wealthy merchant families with dark secrets, and the stock cast for every Hammer Films project ever made. Read the book, look at the pictures, and it all looks good. The problem comes when you add the standard AD&D characters and rules. Doctor Frankenstein meets the Barbarian Swordsman. If this was a movie, it would definitely be of the "B" variety. *Ravenloft* carries too many elements of eighteenth and nineteenth century society to really pass as a hack & slash with side order of vampires.

The early TSR book forays into *Ravenloft* reflect this problem. They involved bringing powerful characters from previous AD&D books over to *Ravenloft*. Perhaps this was intended to make long time TSR fans more comfortable in the new digs, but it was nearly as painful as putting a werewolf in chain mail. More recent *Ravenloft* books have begun to divorce themselves from the more traditional fantasy plot lines, and playing the horror straight works much better.

As a player of *Ravenloft*, the hope is that you will find a gaming group and a dungeon master (DM) willing to play *Ravenloft* for what it is—eighteenth century horror, not medieval gothic. While the strength of the beasts in this realm is such that starting new characters from scratch is a frustrating task, I suggest that you bring old characters in with care, and leave the sword-swinging mentality behind.

In the end, *Vampire* is likely to provide a much more pleasurable gaming experience to the real horror fan. Its more adult slant and emphasis on smooth storytelling lets the dangerous mood of the game show through. No matter where your taste in horror lies, anyone who has a taste for the dark will find something...juicy.

With *Ravenloft*, the real horror fan is likely to be disappointed. The mixture of traditional fantasy and horror doesn't always work, and the fantasy world geography also deflates some of the immediacy found in *Vampire*. Played as a normal AD&D adventure, *Ravenloft* is prone to be more frustrating than frightening. But in the hands of a skillful DM and cooperative players, it can create a unique mood all its own. For those that have experience in more traditional role-playing, *Ravenloft* may well provide a good vehicle for introducing a little darkness into their bands of thieves, and wizards, and priests. And maybe that's what TSR had in mind all along. ♠

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OTHER LAND

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No bodies were found. Not so much as a shoe or a piece of ribbon from a girl's hair was found. Secretly, Yormund was glad.

The complete disappearance of his friends seemed to lend substance to his dreamland, but once or twice, in an unguarded moment, a hideous fear clawed at his mind.

THE YEARS AHEAD WERE LONELY FOR YORMUND and Gita. They missed their friends terribly, but they continued to hope that someday they would join them.

On clear winter nights when the twin peaks stood silhouetted against a moon full and golden, the other land seemed about to burst into being. The summer sunlight, from time to time, seemed to strip Sule of its ordinariness and expose inner wonders. But these glimpses came less frequently as Yormund's childhood passed, and eventually he was no longer certain of what he saw during those precious moments.

In the year Yormund turned eighteen, they ended altogether. In July a team of foreign mountain climbers came to Fallith to climb first the treacherous twin peaks of Sule, and then the snow-covered peak of Kergol, the highest mountain in the land, located three days' walking distance from Sule.

AFTER THEIR TRIUMPH OVER SULE, WHICH was observed by almost the entire village, many villagers saw them off on the morning of their departure for Kergol. The team returned two weeks later with the news that they had successfully climbed the peak of Kergol, and also with the news of a shocking discovery.

In a narrow pass between two of the smaller mountains on the far side of Sule, they had found twenty-four skeletons, most of them small. The skeletons were strewn inside several shallow caves. Two of the climbers guided a party from the village to the spot so that the remains could be brought back for burial. Yormund was among them, for he had to see for himself the vast extent of his guilt. He had to fill his mind, finally, with the truth and crush once and for all the deceitful and dangerous dreams of his childhood.

The sky appeared to darken as he saw the land to which he had driven his boyhood friends. He had driven them to the land of Death. Some coins, buttons and buckles lay among the bones. He recognized Piott's pocketknife. Those treasured glimpses into a land of magic had been delusion.

The bodies were buried in one grave, over which was erected a large monument, with each of the names engraved on the column below the statue of a cherub. What surprised everyone most was how far the children had gotten from the village before they

succumbed. The pain of the loss surfaced again. Parents and relatives wept.

Yormund cried in Gita's arms for many nights. She knew the full horror of his part in those deaths, but she did not recoil from him. When he wanted to declare his guilt to the whole village, she soothed him, insisting they had all had a part in it and they had all built up the delusion, and she persuaded him not to add to everyone's grief by telling the grim story.

Not long after, he and Gita were married. Although Gita's health was never the best, they had seven children. Since they had deprived the village of so many of its young ones, they would have all the children they could.

YORMUND WENT into debt for several years to buy himself a boat. He became a fisherman like his father and most of the men in the village, and the world around him grew dull and tiresome.

He had to work hard to wrest a meager living from the sea. His boat was small and he was never able to afford a larger one. He found a dullness in the summer blue of the sky—it never seemed quite as blue as it had been on certain days he now tried to forget. The fields of arctic roses and saxifrage seemed but faded imitations of something ethereal and no longer attainable, and the palatial fjord mountains, in which he had once seen the hand of some ancient folk, were diminished in his eyes.

Uncle Peli never returned, and his sister, Yormund's mother, dreamed that she saw him dead.

Yormund tried hard not to think of the land of his visions, for those thoughts were painful, but he did not always succeed. He had imagined so much honor, courage and love in that land. But here in this dismal village—where was honor among the stinking fish? Where were courage and love? Courage was the desperate striving with the sea to fill hungry mouths. And love was no more than a struggle for comfort and warmth under the eiderdown. But in the other land, in the golden land, Gita would be his shrewd, sensuous, not-quite-beautiful consort, and he would be....

THE OLD MAN WATCHES TWO OF HIS GRANDSONS squabble over a wooden pony he carved last year. He reminds himself to make another pony. Didn't he see a suitable piece of wood in the shed just the other day? But he is too tired to get up and look.

The sun forces a little of its light through two cloud banks. Sule's twin peaks are embedded in a billowing shroud. The old man thinks of the towers underneath, the ones he used to imagine fashioned by legendary builders who possess this land in a way he can never possess it.

The shroud thins. Wisps fall away from it.

The wind is from the sea, but today the old man cannot smell the sea in it. There is another smell, sweet and aromatic, but subtle like an image at the edge of a dream.

As the moments pass, the old man's rocking chair creaks and groans. He tries to identify that subtle and intriguing smell. A new kind of coffee freshly brewed? Fresh-cut hay? Pungent tropical flowers?

He gives up. The disintegrating shroud splits slowly in two to reveal—finally—the turreted mountaintop, clear and sunlit.

The old man starts. He sees more than just the naturally formed towers. He sees a lofty castle in its entirety, rounded structures in its architecture and each detail sharpened by golden light. He sees a great tree, taller than the mountain itself. It is the world of his visions, the world of his dreams, even more beautiful now than he remembers it from his boyhood.

He stands up. His eyes grow bright with wonder. As if of their own accord, his feet begin to take him toward the mountain, up the gentle lower slope, past Piott's old house. At first he walks. Then his legs begin to feel younger, his blood warmer. His muscles feel strong. He breaks into a slow run and crosses the flower-studded meadow above the waterfall. The ewes with their lambs flee as he passes near.


How could a mere heap of bones have shattered his faith? His boyhood friends are there, of course, in the other land, and soon he will be with them.

The split in the cloud grows wider. The two mists begin to crawl down the mountain. He remembers Gita. What is she doing just now? Perhaps cooking the evening meal or taking clothes down from the line. He cannot go back for her, not this time. She will find her own way soon.

The old man reaches the grass line and bounds beyond it. The mosses glimmer like emeralds on the stony slopes. Softly, a few rays of the other sun single him out—they warm his skin and smooth it. The air grows colder but he feels no chill.

He pauses. He is scarcely a stone's throw from the border. As he pauses, clouds begin to swirl around Sule again.

He looks at the tree. It sends delicate branches into the sky, and he is so close now that he sees its fruit, huge and round and plentiful.

Once again, he pushes ahead. The slope is steep now but he has grown stronger than he ever was. He allows himself only one look back and sees a wall of mist. The clouds have closed up behind him and he is—almost—there. 

Continued from page 35

"Lady, I see no ship—ah, no! No!"

Oh, Lord Jesu, he was tempted.

Still, he couldn't stand and watch her go, for she was his dream and he was her fate. And so he became a silver chain, long and strong and running with moonlight, and he attached himself to shore and ship.

And every link in that silver chain called:
Oh bide, lady, bide! We'll find a way!

Wind moaning, wood groaning, she sobbed for the sea, and sobbed for the love she could only pretend to have: *What way? What way, my dear rusty smith?*

In her cry Will heard all the despair of the drowning, all the hopelessness of the landlost, and the desperation of a sea filled up

with restlessness and aching and constant,
driving change.

He called: *Linden, trust me! Trust me as the ship trusts the chain to keep it safe in harbor. We will find a way.*

SHE COULD HAVE CHANGED TO A WHITE-winged gull and left him on the shore. She could have become the sea's salt spray and left him cold and shivering. She could have been a rain-filled cloud and drifted across the moon.

But she became herself again, faer Linden, standing on the strand, a girl in the sweet promise of youth, a kiss away from full bloom. And she stood soaked and shivering, her hands out-thrust to keep him back from her. She knelt to sift the pebbles and sand, searching and searching until she uncovered what she knew must be hidden there. A small, crooked, rusty treasure from the sea.

An iron nail.

It would hurt, a little. Linden would feel the sting and the scrape, and the sickness of seeing blood welling that—falling—would be the last of her faerie blood and lost forever. For this would be no illusion, no fantasy, no game. Once she cut herself with iron, she would be Fey no more, only a mortal woman already dying, though the death be years away.

"Shall I?" she whispered.

He never took his eyes from Linden. Like he was still that silver chain, red Will never

let her go.

"Will you?" he said.

"If you wish it."

He looked at her for a long, long time; her hair with that hair the color of the best red gold. She'd do what he wished—oh, at last! She would be his and mortal; his, wed and wived.

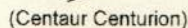
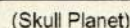
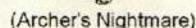
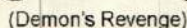
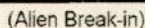
The sea leaped at him, frothing around his knees, pulling and growling and jarring. She would press that iron to her flesh and bleed, if he told her to. And someday she would hate him because it had been his wish that she change this one last time, not hers.

"No, Linden," he said.

He stopped, dry in the mouth and wordless for a long time. Above, the goshawk circled, weaving shadows through the light. Linden stood still as stock, a reach away from him. Her eyes glittered like the stars, her cheek shone white as the moon. Will said, "Do this only if you want it."

In every piece of iron a faer sees the soul once traded for a life so long that it seems like eternity. In the sea gift, the crooked iron, Linden saw her match. In the dear rusty smith, in his bent and ill-healed fingers, his twisted nose, his gap-toothed smile, his limping step—in these she saw her soul and her fate.

Linden drew the nail across her wrist, only lightly, only enough to call a drop of red, red blood. She changed for the last time as the goshawk, Rowan the Summer Queen, cried a mocking farewell and went winging home to Faer Forest.



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ON THE LAST NIGHT OF AUTUMN, RED WILL and his Linden woke to hear the Dreamless King riding in company down the windy-wild sky. The Horned Lord and Rowan—or some new light o' love. Maybe this time his bedwoman was made of fire and shadow, a swift and changeable faerie girl who had in place of a soul the fancies seen in leaping flames. Will watched Linden as she listened to the wind and the riding.

"Girl, do you miss the Wild King?"

Linden turned from the night. "Not I." She smiled to see him so intently watching. "The most of Fey I have forgotten."

That was true. Each day brought her new joy, and all the joys bore: a garden set and harvested, a child wombed and birthed, a day spent in company with her man, a night spent in his arms. Each of those nights passing took with it another memory of the ended days among the Deathless. Linden didn't regret the taking or the passing, and not every one of her memories left her. She remembered how to dance in the moonlight, she remembered how to be her Will's dream.

And she never forgot the Summer Queen. For when her son was born, a fine, fair little one whose hair shone like the best red gold, Linden—who'd only lately learned to dream—learned that she could see into her son's dreams too. First she shivered to see what he dreamed, then one day she learned how to laugh about it.

And now, on this last night of autumn, in the deep hour of dark, as though he knew his mother was thinking of him, Linden's little red son woke, howling for her breast. She got up from the bed and fetched him, settled them back in the warmth under the blankets, the warmth beside Will. Her rusty smith watched for a while after she set their boy to breast, then he snuggled down under the wool and went to sleep.

Asleep, a-dream, he heard their boy suckle contentedly. Asleep, a-dream, he heard his wife say: "They'll think you are mad, my red, red son. They'll think you a dream-chaser with no sense. But fate is not madness, and you must remember that dreams are not illusions. Your dream is real, my dear red son. You will find her in Faer Forest, up over Crowned Hill.

"You are her fate. And she is yours."

Will heard their son groan for the pleasure of filling himself with Linden's good milk, heard the babe sigh over his infant dreams. And Will knew what dream the boy slept with, for he could see it in his son's eyes, the shadow of a haunting and hunting to come.

The red son of the rusty smith and his faer Linden sighed over dreams of golden Rowan, of the Fey Queen like summer come, her hair all red-glinting chestnut a-tumble down her back; her eyes as blue as the low falling sky. Rowan as ripe as ready harvest, or fate found. ♣

(Inspired by Child ballad No. 44, "The Two Magicians.")

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MÜNCHEN

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"They are *muli*, departed spirits of good Rom. The Rom must not harm anything as wild and free as themselves. Men, the *muli* could kill. Wild animals, they may not touch. Nor may we, the living Rom, at the peril of our souls."

Beside me, the honey-colored frog sat up. He shook his head, looked up at me and made a trilling croak that sounded suspiciously like a laugh. Behind him, the white eyes of the murdered Rom boy gleamed accusingly.

At that moment I hated. The prince was a murderous, wicked man who had escaped a well-deserved death at the hands of the Rom's ancestor spirits by becoming an ageless magical creature, awaiting another credulous benefactor to trick into freeing him.

I looked at the *phuri dai*. "I am not bound by Rom beliefs, even though I travel with you."

She looked me calmly in the eye. "That is up to you. You are still *gadje*."

The frog understood and scrambled away, but not quickly enough. I grabbed one of his plump hind legs and stood, hoisting him kicking and squalling, into the air. He sounded more like a pig than a frog. I picked up the sword with which he had tried to kill Perdita.

"You have done evil. You do not deserve to live. Those who followed you have helped you to do your evil. I do not know whether they deserve to die, but I can ensure they never live as human beings again. You are the linchpin of the spell. Without you, the others will remain beasts forever."

I raised the sword.

Rats swarmed up my body, biting, clawing, squealing, making for my head. Startled, I dropped the frog. He hit the ground on his back with an odd, crunching sound. He flailed about, trying to gain his feet. I knocked a rat off my shoulder, raised the sword with both hands and swung it down to the ground, slicing the frog prince in two, right through his rotten heart. Ageless he might have been, but he was not immortal.

Magic discharged from the frog up through the sword into my body, searing my hands and face before it flowed out the top of my head. The rats screamed and fell away, singed and twitching, to die on the ground. One of them had a single human ear, another a suspiciously pink patch of hairless flesh on its belly. I didn't want to look any closer and staggered away from the little corpses.

I sank to the ground, suddenly bereft of strength. The *muli* gathered around me, chilling me to the bone, but I had not even the strength to fear them.

The *phuri dai* knelt beside me, taking up my hands and examining them. "You will regain the use of your hands," she said, looking into my eyes. "But you will always bear the marks of what you did for the world this day." She gently probed the raw flesh of my left cheek, bloodying her fingers. She wiped my blood on her apron, then ran her hand

through my hair. Great hanks of my hair came away in her hand, all of it gone dead white.

"How is it that you can come to us, Revered Ones?" Phillip asked the roiling air.

The *phuri dai*, dusting my poor hair from her hands, stiffened suddenly. She climbed awkwardly to her feet, twitching. Her mouth opened and closed several times.

Finally she began to speak, in a guttural, unnatural voice. "We wander. We are not bound. We cannot rest. No gold in the grave, no wine on the earth, no *Pomana* rites. No cleansing fires. Rom blood spilled on this, our death place, called to us."

The sounds she made were horrible, forced from her human lungs by inhuman force. At that moment I was glad I didn't have the Gift.

"What kind of Rom would lose their ancestor spirits by failing to observe proper death rites," muttered Phillip.

"No fault of our children. Too many dead. Our children died with us. Bodies choked the sacred earth, Rom and *gadje* alike. None left to make *Pomana*." Tears coursed freely down the cheeks of the *phuri dai*.

"Show us where you lie and we will give you gold and wine and make *Pomana* for you," said Phillip.

"You cannot." The *phuri dai* shivered and came back to herself. "We cannot help them. Our need called them from the Shall Be. They have not yet been born. Now they must wait here for time to catch them up, wait to live and die, wait to suffer whatever future calamity it is that shall carry so many Rom to their deaths. This place is dire and twisted. Maybe it was always evil or maybe it became evil because of the things men did and shall do here. If the *muli* are adrift in time, perhaps the evil is too, a lodestone for wicked deeds, drawing the dark from human hearts. We must leave this place and never return, for the sake of our children's children."

So we gathered up as much of the prince's wealth as we could carry. We buried the lad with the sword-slit belly and all the other Rom the soldiers had killed. We put some of the prince's gold into the ground with them, we poured the last of our wine into the earth above them, we burned their possessions in a great funeral fire, and we began the *Pomana* rites even as we left the meadow, that no spirits of Phillip's tribe should end up among the damned shades who haunted that place.

The Rom defer to me now, honor the injuries I sustained battling evil on their behalf. The *phuri dai* names me victor in the struggle, but I am not so sure. I thought the death of the frog would seal the others in animal form forever, containing their wickedness. Yet the *muli* came from some dark future, where Rom and *gadje* alike shall die by the hundreds of thousands in this quiet place just beyond München town. I think the evil will arise again. For my part, I shall set up shop as a metalworker in the Low Countries and have nothing to do with things magical for the rest of my days. ♀

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Contributors

CONNIE WILLIS IS THE AUTHOR OF last year's Nebula and Hugo Award winning-novel, *Doomsday Book*, and short story, "Even the Queen," which made her the first author to have ever won the awards in all four categories. Her next novel, a short work called *Remake*, will be out from Bantam Books next spring, and she is currently working on *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, set in the same time travel universe as *Doomsday Book*.

Charles de Lint is the Canadian author of *Moonheart*, *The Dreaming Place*, *The Little Country*, and numerous other books of fantasy, horror and suspense. He is also the author of the fairy tale novel *Jack the Giant Killer*, which, like much of his work, mixes folklore and mythic motifs with modern urban settings.

Amy Wolf is a graduate of Clarion West '92, and has published thirty-six stories in the SF/fantasy/horror press. She is now working on a novel set in the period of the Crusades. Amy worked in the film industry for fifteen years, in feature advertising, post-production and development.

Nancy Varian Berberick is the author of five fantasy novels and more than a dozen short stories. When telling a story, she likes best to weave the threads of myth and history, and with shelves full of books about King Arthur, Nancy was certain that someday she'd write a novel based on the famous king. As it turns out, she became more interested in the notorious Saxon invaders. Interest became passion, and passion became historical fantasies, the latest of which is the novel *The Panther's Hoard*.

Paula May is holding the line against entropy in her little corner of suburbia with her husband, two kids, dog, blind goldfish, mortgage, etc. Her short fiction has been published in *Analogue*, *Universe II*, and *Tomorrow*.

Andrea Schlecht lives in Ottawa, Canada, with her husband, daughter, son and cat. She's worked for the government as an archivist and a researcher in military history. Spare time is for writing, and previously, her stories and poems have appeared in literary magazines and in the smaller science fiction and fantasy publications. Due

to government cutbacks, her spare time will increase next year.

Mary O'Keefe Young's illustrations have appeared in eight children's books, greeting cards, magazines and ads. Her newest book, *Helen and the Hudson Hornet*, will come out in the spring of 1995. Painting fantasy portraits is her passion.

The former editor of *Starshore*, **Richard Rowand** makes his home in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. His current projects include working on a novel and editing *The Whether Report: A Journal on the Art Craft & Feeling of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror*.



Paula May



Andrea Schlecht

KEN GRANING HAS MANY YEARS of experience as a professional illustrator. A 1966 graduate of Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, Ken's advertising and illustrations have appeared in numerous magazines, such as *Playboy*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Readers Digest*, *Time*, and countless books, newspapers and record albums. He recently held a one-man retrospective exhibition in Michigan. Ken currently devotes every spare moment of his time to developing a body of paintings depicting landscape and animal themes.

Charles J. Demorat, a graduate from Newark School of Fine and Industrial Art, has been a freelance illustrator for five years. He lives in North Carolina with his wife and twin daughters, dividing his "spare" time between collecting old and new science fiction and fantasy related toys and his beautiful 1963 Cadillac.

Laurie Harden was raised in Mountain Lakes and now resides in Boonton, New Jersey. After attending Kansas City Art Institute majoring in painting, she changed majors to illustration and transferred to the Rhode Island School of Design. In addition to freelance illustrations, she also does portraits and oil paintings.

David Beck has been a freelance artist for fifteen years, working with top advertising clients nationwide, as well as doing movie posters, book illustrations and editorial projects. He has won numerous awards from the Society of Illustrators and Communication Arts annual exhibitions.



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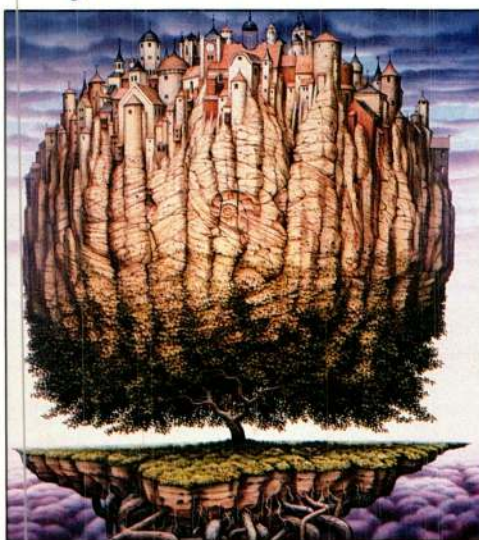
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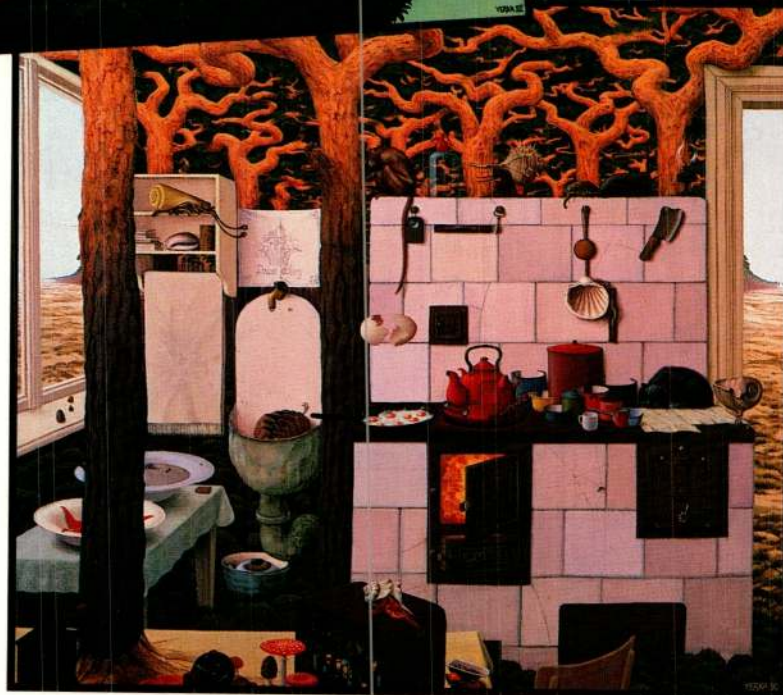
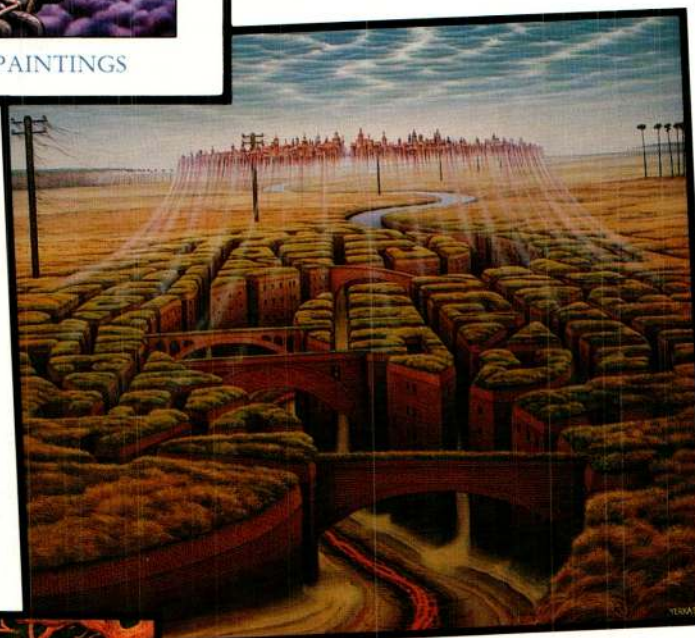
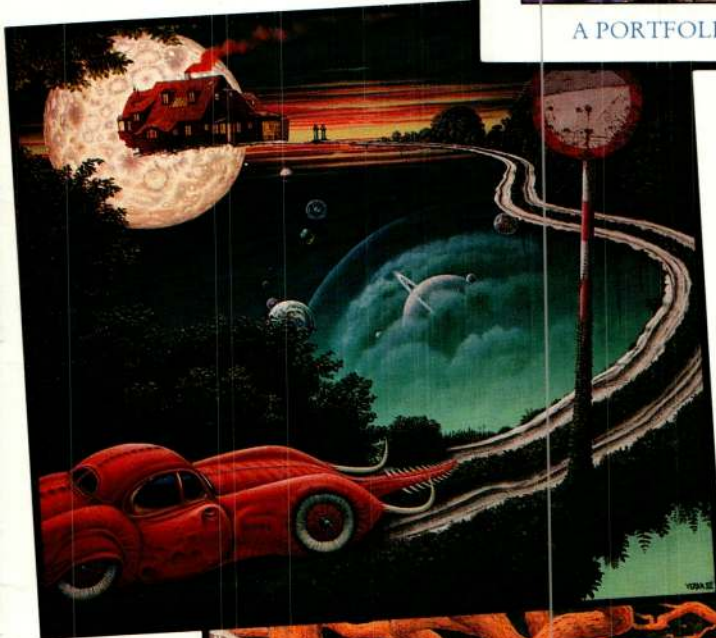


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